

2015 PADDLE GUIDE

+ 4 CROSSOVER KAYAKS REVIEWED

CANOE & KAYAK

WHAT'S NEXT

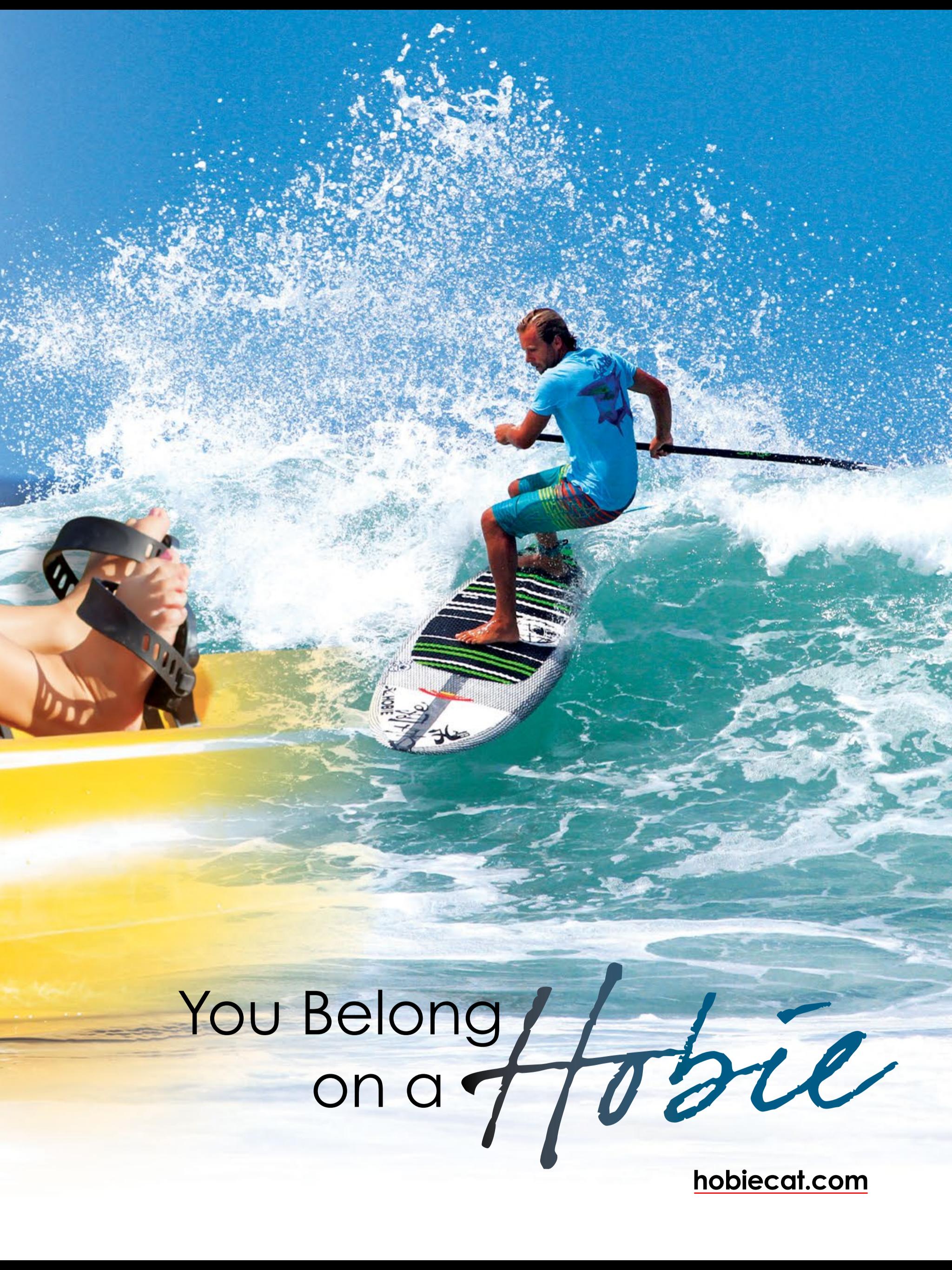
LOOKING AHEAD TO THE TECHNOLOGY, SHIFTING
DEMOGRAPHICS AND CLIMATE EXTREMES SHAPING
THE FUTURE OF PADDLING

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PET DRONES // BUG-OUT BOATS // DIY MAPS // THE TRIP OF YOUR LIFE





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Peak Gadget

Our first order of business was to cross about a mile to a nearby island. Naturally, my brother and I couldn't agree which one.

The fog had come in overnight, dense enough that you couldn't make out the islands if you stared straight at them. If you scanned the horizon and didn't try too hard, though, they'd register as subtle changes of gray.

My brother pointed confidently to the smudge on the right. My compass told me to aim for the one on the left. Like most arguments between siblings, this one was of little consequence—at worst, we'd have a quarter-mile detour to get back on course. So I agreed to try it his way, just to be there when he found out he was wrong.

When we got to his island I didn't say anything. I just eased ahead and veered left. It was a very satisfying quarter-mile. Any little brother knows the feeling of proving an older sibling wrong, but

thinking back on that day almost 20 years later, what really felt good was the simple act of taking that compass bearing.

Such things have always drawn us to the outdoors. Building a fire. Pitching a tarp that will withstand a coming squall. Finding your way with map and compass. The practice of self-sufficiency takes on new meaning in a world that no longer requires it.

Still, not long after that brotherly adventure I started packing a GPS unit. I developed a bad habit of tucking it under my deck bungee and using it like a speedometer. I always know where I am, but sometimes lose track of the reason I came in the first place.

As we look toward our paddling future, we see an ever-growing array of gadgets that do these things for us. The trend is inexorable. Wearable electronics are coming soon, as researchers race to provide the military with power-

generating jackets, better batteries and head-up navigation displays. As the C&K staff worked on the story package predicting "Your Paddling Future" (p. 22), we found ourselves gravitating toward stories that are less about innovative technology, and more about what it allows us to experience. The bit on wearable electronics landed on the cutting room floor; items about exploring recently undammed rivers and the new sharing economy made the issue. The techno-widgets are fun to talk about, but it's the paddling possibilities that capture our imagination.

So in the spirit of unlikely optimism, I suggest that paddling is finally approaching 'Peak Gadget,' the moment when the demand for electronic gizmos of all types begins its inevitable decline. I'm going to start by stowing the GPS and keeping my compass close to hand.

— Jeff Moag

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CONTENTS

MAY 2015

32 **ONE LIFE**

Kayaking's young kings chase the next level at the progress-first debut of the Rey del Rio Waterfall World Championship.

By Dave Shively

FEATURES

42 **FULL CIRCLE**

A round-the-world canoe journey reveals new insights into the future of canoe tripping.

By Zand B. Martin

DEPARTMENTS

P. 14 LETTERS // P. 16 GALLERY // P. 64 GEAR: Four new crossover kayaks. Plus, rescue beacons. // **P. 72 UNFILTERED:** Gordon Brown // **P. 74 DIRTBAG DIARIES:** Latvians in the Yukon



ONLINE at CANOEKAYAK.COM: The Pacific Paddle Surfing Series finale in Santa Cruz, film debuts from Mountain Mind Collective, and the world's most threatened paddling paradises. Plus, fresh gear reviews.

PUT IN

P. 22 C&K's Futurama: How paddlers will adapt to a changing world

P. 28 The DIY future of mapping backwoods canoe routes

P. 30 Eddy on self-driving shuttle rigs and packing for the apocalypse

ON THE COVER

Chris Bensch at Chi Chi Beach, Washington.

Photo by Fredrik Marnsater.



THIS PAGE Wind River, Yukon Territory. *Photo by Peter Mather.*



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VOLUME 43 // ISSUE 2

MAY 2015

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CANOE & KAYAK Is published 5 times per year:
March, May, June, August and December.

Published by Canoe & Kayak, Inc.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: To change your address or order new subscriptions email canoe kayak@emailcustomerservice.com or call 800-765-5501. You can also write to Canoe & Kayak magazine, Subscription Department, PO Box 420235 Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Please send your new address and mailing label from last issue. Allow 8-10 weeks for processing. Thanks for your patience. Occasionally, our subscriber list is made available to reputable firms offering goods and services that we believe would be of interest to our readers. If you prefer to be excluded, please send your current address label and note requesting to be excluded from these promotions to TEN: The Enthusiast Network, LLC, 831 S. Douglas St., El Segundo, Ca. 90245, Attn: Privacy Coordinator.

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REPRINTS: Contact Wright's Media @ 877.652.5295 (281.419.5725 outside the U.S. and Canada) to purchase quality custom reprints or e-prints of articles appearing in this publication.

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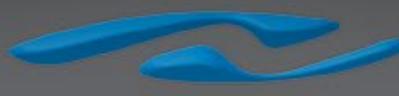
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LETTER
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Aaron Schmidt

WHAT WOULD ABBEY SAY?

I am a boater and a conservationist, so I am at a crossroads on this Yellowstone Paddling Ban. I love boating with a passion and want to run every river I can. But while boating is low-impact, it isn't no-impact. Yellowstone is one of the few remaining protected wild places in this country and this world, and remains unique in its approach to river access. There is something

very important and powerful to be said for keeping wilderness areas off-limits to human intrusion, no matter how minimal. Save some of these places for the non-human flora and fauna. The ban on boating in Yellowstone is a unique and valuable regulation that should remain in place. I can't help but wonder: What would Edward Abbey say? — **Dan F.**

— *Thanks for contributing to this conversation that has many paddlers asking themselves hard questions. (Follow our ongoing coverage of the Yellowstone and Grand Teton Paddling Act at CanoeKayak.com.) We're sending you a new NRS Vapor PFD to keep you out paddling the wild sections that you can.*



RE: GRAND CANYON SPEED RUN

Isn't that a little like a speed-eating contest at the finest restaurant in the world? I don't get it.

— **Dave R.**

Most risks worth taking are stupid and unnecessary. We even have a special word for it: Adventure! Pushing it, or progression, is deeply embedded in the history of sport, and it's a fundamentally personal pursuit. Hats off, lads. Dare to go faster and farther.

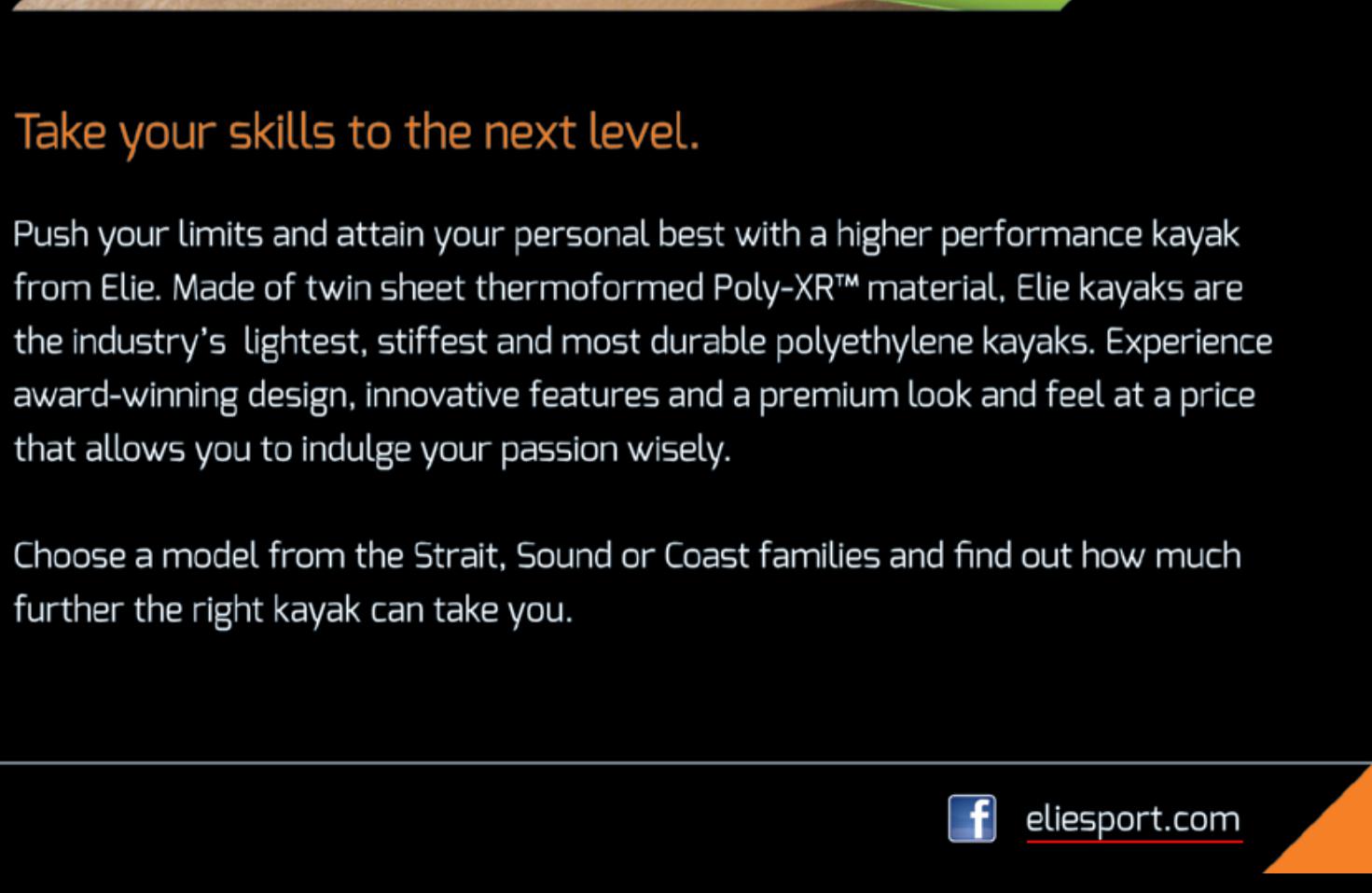
— **Nicholas C.**

*Write us at letters@canoekayak.com.
Letters may be edited for clarity and length.*

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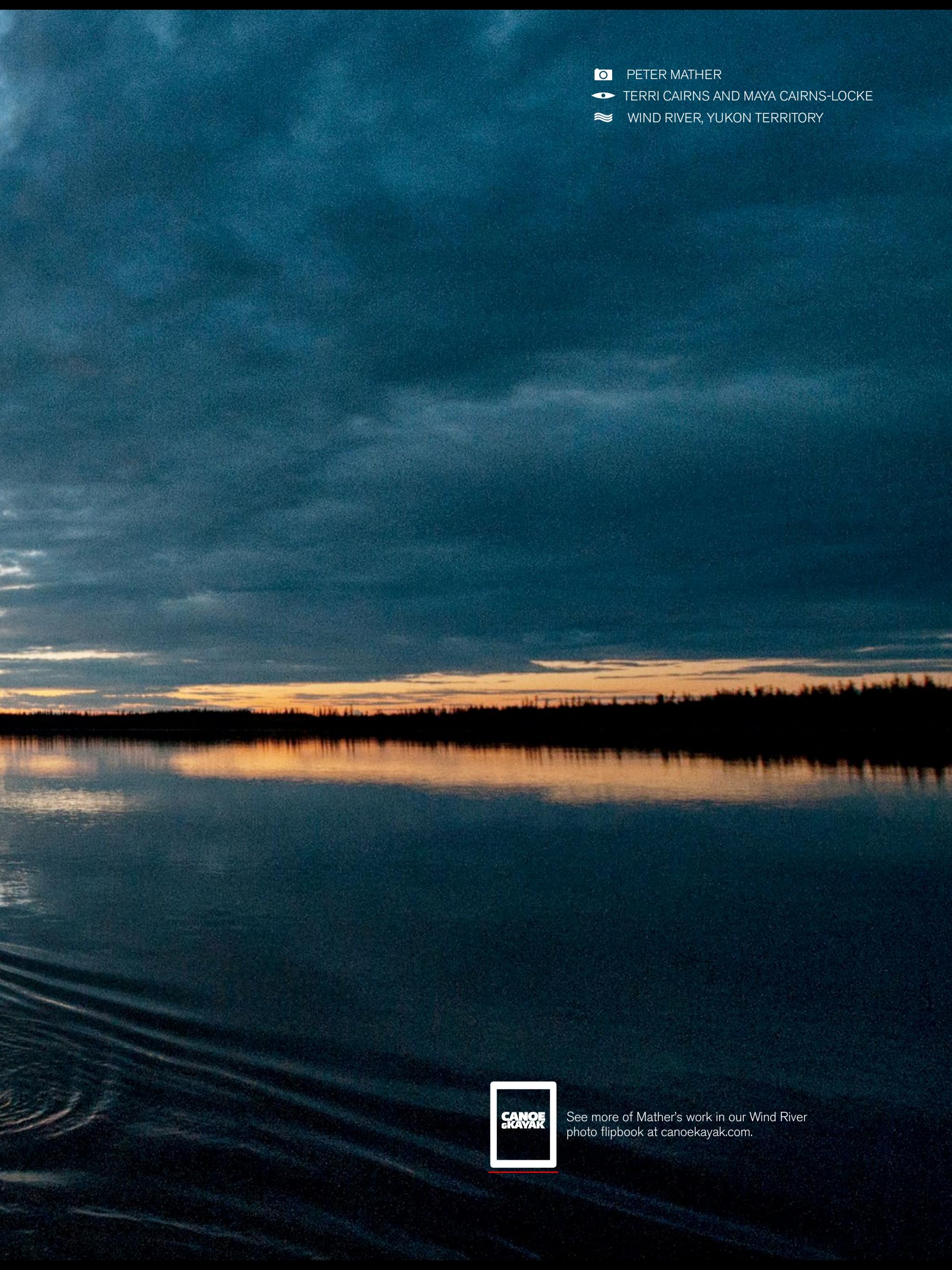


"Ben began making strange facial expressions and ambiguous arm motions. I stared at him blankly until he finally gave up and hollered 'Bear!'" Chris Korbulic recalls. "Later we laughed about my confusion, and that nobody had thought to create a hand signal for 'bear.'



Read Korbulic's feature story and view more Destination Torngat photos at canoekayak.com.





 PETER MATHER
 TERRI CAIRNS AND MAYA CAIRNS-LOCKE
 WIND RIVER, YUKON TERRITORY



See more of Mather's work in our Wind River photo flipbook at canoekayak.com.

YOUR PADDL

How technology, demographics and a shifting climate will change the way you paddle



THE AGE OF REDISCOVERY

The great rivers have been mapped and run, the remotest coastlines paddled long ago. Everything worth discovering has been explored, right? Wrong. Everyday paddlers—you and me—can now spy with impunity on potential new runs. We have more information than ever before, from Google Earth's all-seeing (and free!) eye in the sky, to real-time gauge telemetry and camera-equipped drones to scout beyond the next horizon line. That's not all. According to American Rivers, more than 600 dams have been removed from U.S. streams in the last 10 years, uncovering thousands of river miles not seen nor paddled for decades. As dam-removal efforts gains momentum, river-boaters won't be the only ones with new waters to explore. The newly un-dammed Elwha River has already deposited millions of tons of sediment on the Washington coast, creating new wildlife habitat and an intriguing surf break for sea kayakers to explore. —JM

THE PACKRAFT REVOLUTION

Packrafts are reviving wilderness travel, and the newer designs are more capable than ever. They excel at low flows and pair well with other sports like skiing, biking, canyoneering and backpacking. And they're much less intimidating to beginners than hardshell kayaks or even canoes.

— Packraft evangelist
Forrest McCarthy

Jim Harris



ING FUTURE



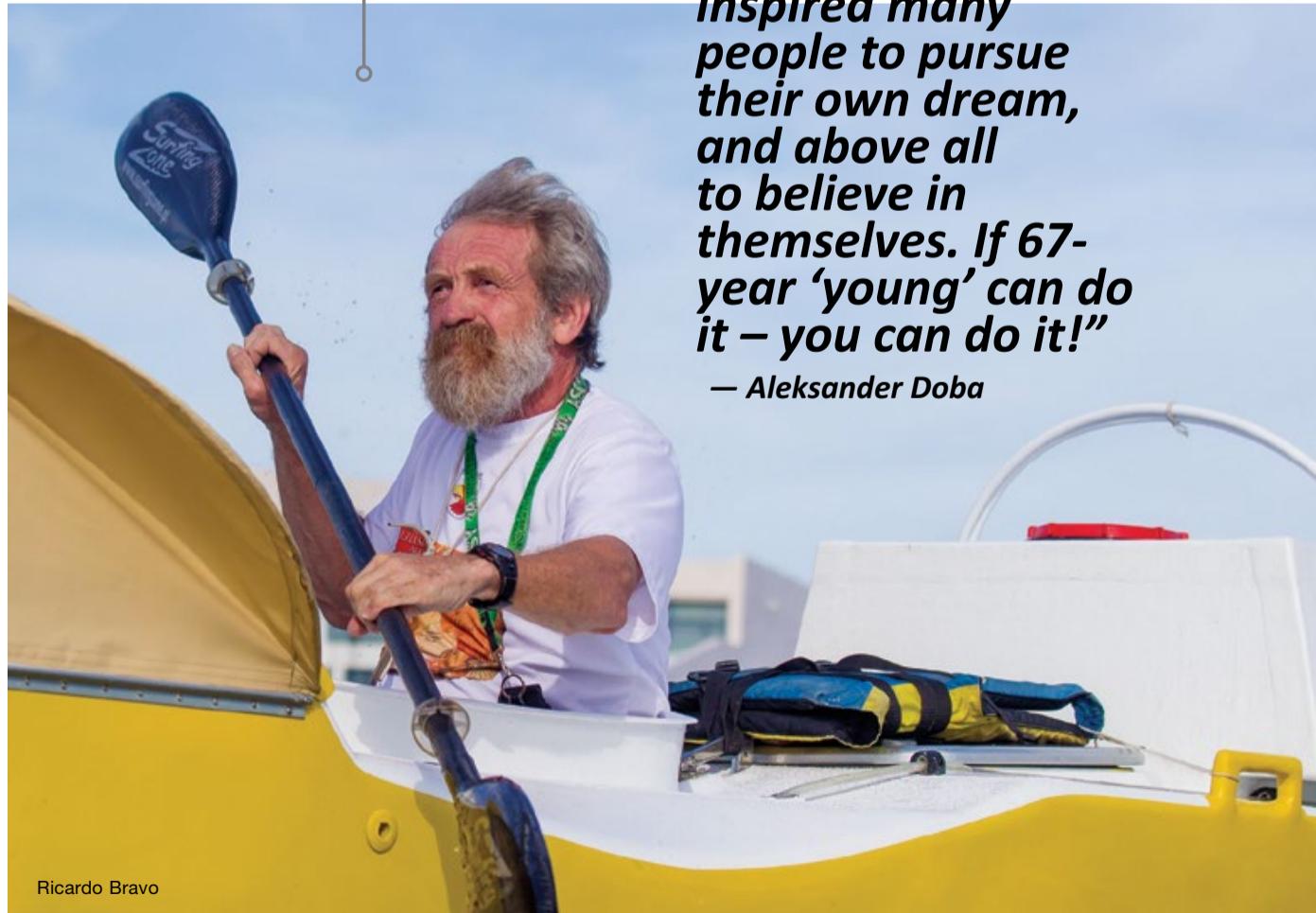
Peter Essick/Aurora

THE TRIP OF YOUR LIFETIME

If you thought the '60s were great, wait until your 60s.

As the American population grows older, millions of people are coming into a lot of free time, with their bodies still reasonably intact and access to a new generation of lighter, sleeker kayaks and canoes. Why wouldn't they strike out on the trip of a lifetime? Many already have, from 57-year-old Janet Moreland, who went on a 3,900-mile source-to-sea charm offensive on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, to Polish folk hero Aleksander Doba, who kayaked across the Atlantic Ocean at the age of 67.

By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be over the age of 65.



Ricardo Bravo

"I hope that my endeavor has inspired many people to pursue their own dream, and above all to believe in themselves. If 67-year 'young' can do it – you can do it!"

— Aleksander Doba



Chance of securing a Grand Canyon permit on Sept. 17, 2014:
0.0749 PERCENT
Chance of securing a permit on any of nine days in December 2014:
100 PERCENT

SHOULDER SEASONS

As peak demand for permitted river trips continues to grow, more boaters will get wise to shoulder seasons. Spotty flows, shorter days, the occasional blizzard: The same factors that keep the masses away have a certain appeal to the well-equipped optimist. A new breed of crossover kayaks (see our review on p. 52) is equally at home on the flats and moderate whitewater, and will carry a week's worth of gear with ease. Add drysuits cut from new miracle fabrics, waterproof-down sleeping bags, even dehydrated beer. Your off-season river trip is going to be more comfortable than you ever imagined. —JM

Maxi Kniewasser

DYSTOPIA: BUGGIN' OUT

By Dave Shively

What does the future hold? Zombies obviously, if you've been paying attention. And everyone knows that zombies can't swim, instantly increasing paddlers' chances. A few questions remain: Where to go? What to pack? The folks at urban disaster/survival mag *OFF GRID* posed an answer with an exhaustive six-page profile of the ultimate "Bug-Out 'Yak" in their Fall 2014 issue, straying from more typical canned-meat taste test and amputation-tip stories. Doomsday preppers loaded down camo fishing kayaks with no fewer than nine firearm options, plus ammo, spare magazines, bandoliers, folding shovels, machetes, even a Gurkha kukri knife. How about a decent paddle? If you can't out-paddle the undead, then, in survivalist lingo, you're SOL when SHTF.

— Check out Eddy's end days bug-out boat tips on p. 30

UTOPIA: THE SHARING ECONOMY

By Neil Schulman

If you can rent someone's spare bedroom on AirBnB, why not kayaks and canoes? In my own neighborhood, I can borrow a flatwater canoe, a high-performance tandem sea kayak, a surf kayak and all manner of whitewater canoes, kayaks and inflatables. When traveling, a shared boat is more than a cost-saving convenience—it's a way into the local scene, with all the inside knowledge and cultural immersion that come with it. Today, Facebook provides an imperfect portal to this boat-sharing utopia. Soon we'll have apps for that, both homegrown paddler networks and Silicon Valley startups like Sportzy, which is determined to do to the sporting gear market what Uber and Lyft did to taxis.

ICE OUT

By Doug Schnitzspahn

Now that the only people who still say the world's ice isn't melting are politicians on oil-company payrolls, let's talk about what that means. Will we soon be paddling the streets of Manhattan like some kind of post-apocalyptic Venice? No. Not soon, anyway. Still, the Big Melt already is changing the places we paddle in profound ways, says polar explorer Eric Larsen, who made a 550-mile paddle and pull across open ocean and sea ice to reach the North Pole in 2006. A decade before, he could have skied the whole way. Ten years from now, it could be primarily a paddling trip. "The nature of sea ice has changed dramatically," Larsen says. "I've seen first hand how the ice is thinner than in 2006. It is much more broken up than it used to be."



Eric Larsen



Erich Schlegel

PADDLING THE EXTREMES

With California already locked in its worst drought in more than 1,200 years, a new study from NASA warns that things will only get worse for all of us. While most regions of the country are getting drier overall, we're also seeing a marked increase in so-called "very intense precipitation events" in every part of the continental U.S. The data suggests the future—our future, the one that starts tomorrow—will bring deeper droughts, more frequent floods and, because more precipitation is falling as rain than as snow, shorter runoff seasons. We'll learn to paddle the extremes, using packrafts to navigate rivers at ultra-low flows, and making the most of those short seasons. And we'll probably catch those rare high-water classics more often, too. —JM



David Hanson

"We flew by the familiar islands and back channels and forests in such a continuous cataclysm of swiftly sliding water and boils and eddies and whirlpools that the trip began to feel like a stream-of-consciousness dream, and every night at camp I felt light-headed as all of the places I know so well, and am used to seeing at the Mississippi's regular pace, replayed themselves in an endless frenetic reel." —John Ruskey, on paddling the great Mississippi flood of 2011.

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Ben Marr

REMEMBERING THE SELFIE APOCALYPSE

By Brendan Leonard

"Son," I will say to a young man a decade from now, "I remember the days when we had to have other people take our picture." That was back before 2014, which Twitter declared "The Year of the Selfie," and the year we were introduced to personal drone copters that would follow you everywhere.

We wore our little video cameras on our heads, I'll say, or on the front or back of our boats, and you always had to turn to your friend and ask, "Am I blinking?" Sometimes you didn't know, and you'd go through a whole 10 minutes of immortal rad-ness with your camera off, the highlight of your career uncaptured. Then you wouldn't even have a video to show people on your computer later, saying, "This angle doesn't do it justice—it was HUGE!"

Nowadays, you kids, with your auto-follow drones and 3D POV, you're spoiled. You just pop on your sprayskirt, launch your drone, and by the time you take out, you've got the raw material for what we used to call a "sick edit." All you have to do is add in some of that tasteless music you kids listen to now, because you don't know any better.



Shon Bollock

EXPEDITION AS THEATER

For 19 days in January, the world stood transfixed as two men climbed a 3,000-foot granite face in Yosemite National Park. The duo were engaged in something that elite paddlers have been doing for the last few years—combining cutting-edge athletic performance with self-produced coverage in real time. When Twitter and the *New York Times* took notice, the Dawn Wall became an international sensation. Watch for trending topics like #tsangpo, #nwpassage and #niagara, because paddling's 15-minute blaze of glory is coming soon. —JM



Wayfinder: Gillet on the island of Maui, Courtesy Ed Gillet

THE END OF BEING LOST

Remember Ed Gillet, who steered his kayak from California to Hawaii in 1986 with nothing more than his wits and a plastic sextant? Do you really think the bossy little voice inside Ed Gillet's smartphone is impressed by that now? It's hard enough to get lost already. Just wait until the future, when taking personal responsibility for locating yourself will be an exercise in nostalgia, like dressing up as mountain men and shooting black-powder rifles. Yes, we're safer. Yes, the Coast Guard is never more than a satellite ping away (until they aren't). But it's not nearly so much fun. Still, if you must, check out our review of satellite locators on page 58.

THE WATER IS WAITING



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Jim Harris

THE FUTURE OF MAPS

TRENDING: DIY CANOE ROUTES

BY CONOR MIHELL

As austerity budgets strangle backcountry services across North America, a new generation of amateur filmmakers and citizen mapmakers is taking the future of wilderness tripping into their own hands. The result is a growing array of maps and detailed trip reports that are tailor-made for paddlers, better than any bureaucrat could deliver.

Tripper: Jeff McMurtrie

Roots: McMurtrie's crusade began at age 16, when he and a friend struggled to make sense of errors on a government map while canoeing the hinterlands of Algonquin Provincial Park. Now a 26-year-old entrepreneur, mapping Ontario's most popular canoe areas is McMurtrie's full-time job.

Process: "Relentlessly accurate," canoe-friendly maps for Algonquin, Killarney and Temagami, available in print and online at jeffsmap.com.

Inspiration: "To make people's trips better. That might sound like a bit of an odd aim for a map—after all we often think of them purely as tools for navigation—but it's really just about minimizing the number of bad experiences resulting from people having the wrong expectations. The fact that I have the potential to influence people's trips is really, really inspiring."

Tripper: Doug Crews-Nelson

Roots: Crews-Nelson, a cartographer by trade, spent two years developing a poster-sized map encompassing the entire Boundary Waters Canoe Area. He made the map in memory of the late friend who introduced him to the BWCA.

Process: Paper or fabric wall maps in sizes up to 77-by-44 inches, available for purchase at etsy.com.

Inspiration: "This map is a labor of love for others, as much as it is for myself. I draw inspiration from the trips I've taken and those I take in my imagination."

Trippers: Brad and Wayne Jennings

Roots: Father-son tradition: Wayne Jennings introduced his son, Brad, to canoe tripping as a toddler. A videographer by profession, Wayne took advantage of the compact, waterproof revolution in digital photography to document the Jennings' canoeing experiences.

Process: YouTube trip reports highlighting well-known and forgotten canoe routes across Ontario, and detailed maps available online at explorethebackcountry.com.

Inspiration: "Exploring seldom-traveled canoe routes and sharing our videos helps to spread awareness, and ultimately help protect those places."



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Aaron McKinney

APOCALYPSE NOW?

The Future According to Eddy

WHEN WILL WE HAVE SELF-DRIVING SHUTTLE RIGS?

Eddy has a dream: Drive to the put-in, launch the canoe, and the car drives itself to the takeout. No shuttle required. But when will his dream come true? Self-driving Google prototype cars are motoring all over California right now, and Nissan recently announced plans for self-driving cars by 2020, but no one Eddy talked to thinks that's realistic. "The technology has to be bulletproof," says General Motors spokesman Dan Flores. "Ninety-five percent reliable isn't good enough when you are talking about cars and safety." Right now, the technology is good enough for GM to roll out something called "Supercruise" in 2017 Cadillacs. On highways only, the car will steer itself (hands and feet free) between lane lines and automatically slow down and speed up "in stop-and-go traffic," says Flores. The car will use GPS, LIDAR (radar that works with light rays),

and cameras that see the painted lines. "That technology will get more and more accurate," says Flores, "but self-driving cars are more than 10 years away." One big issue is that the pointy headed insurance zombies have to figure out who's gonna pay when the first self-driving car goes all Dukes of Hazzard through the middle of Duluth—the owner, or Chevy? As for the four-wheeling aspects, "the military is very interested in automated caravans, which are often through rough terrain and during wartime, so they'll get that figured out," Flores says. Bring it, says Eddy. He's tired of loaning his Suzuki Sidekick (modified with roll bar and winch) to Mom in exchange for shuttle bunny duties.

WHAT'S IN EDDY'S BUG-OUT CANOE?

Survivalists pack bug-out bags so they can head for refuge when, as we like to say, SHTF, whether the emergency scenario is the collapse of the American financial

system or Karl Jepperson figuring out you're the one who glitter-bombed his Voyageur costumes. Of course, canoes carry quite a bit of stuff, so Eddy will be living pretty high compared to all those ridge-walking hillbilly preppers. Holstered into his designated bug-out canoe (BOC) are the usual things: lighters, flashlight, big ol' knife, etc. But Eddy has his own take on the BOC, 'cause as we like to say, if you aren't prepping, you aren't thinking. Like a couple of pounds of vacuum-sealed Cheetos. They taste great, sure, but also work pretty well as a fire-starter (*ed. note: This is true*). There are tampons to staunch wounds, or to stick into your ears to drown out the screams of the folks getting rounded up into death camps while Eddy paddles to his secret hideout. One thing he learned when he bugged out after the Jell-O salad incident last winter is that life after the apocalypse can get boring. So, he's got a couple of stashed bottles of Yukon Jack and a banjo just in case.

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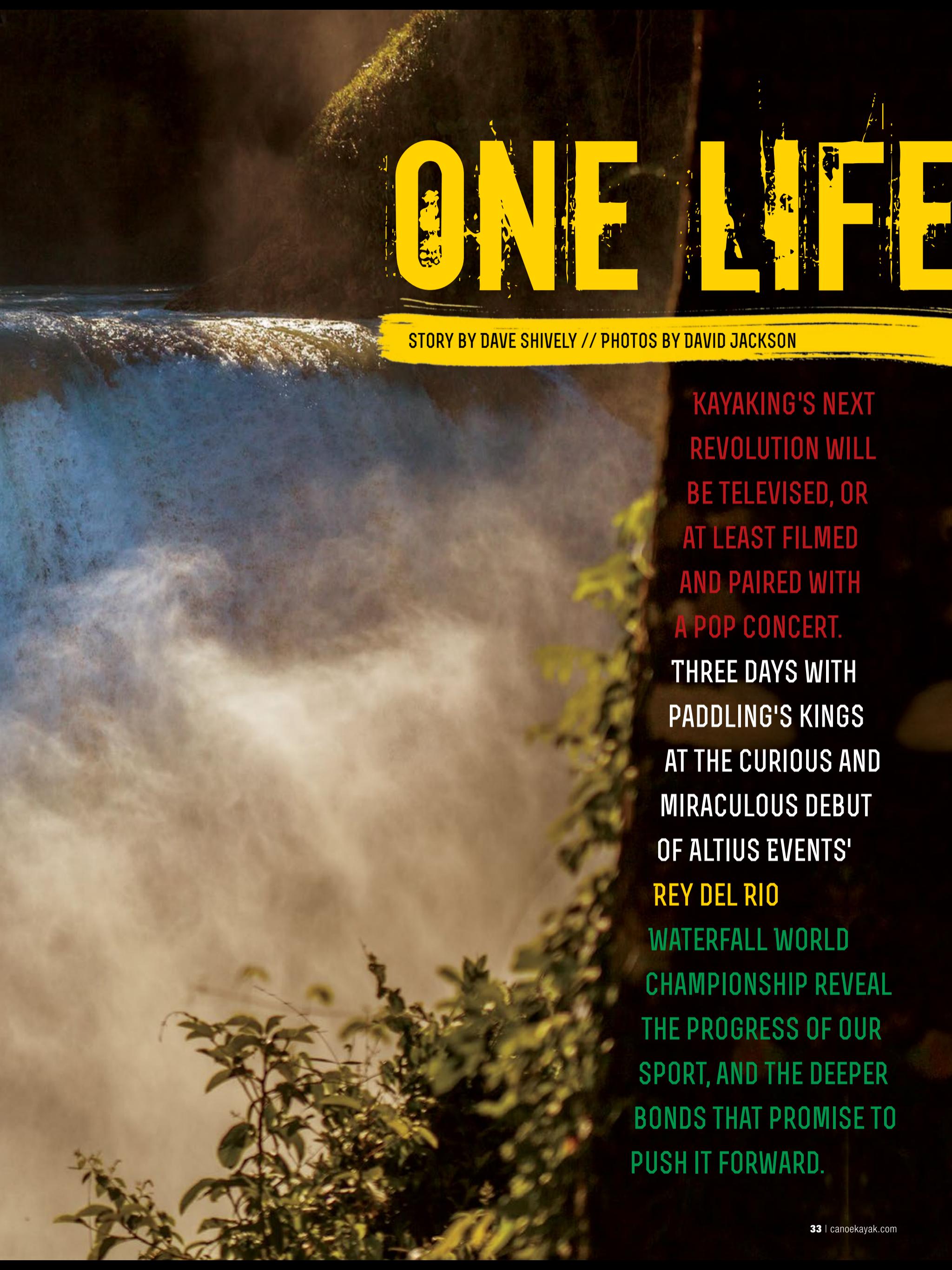
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Huge in Mexico: Isaac Levinson fires off the freeride competition's crux drop on the final day of Altius Events' Rey del Rio Waterfall World Championship.

ONE LIFE



STORY BY DAVE SHIVELY // PHOTOS BY DAVID JACKSON

KAYAKING'S NEXT REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED, OR AT LEAST FILMED AND PAIRED WITH A POP CONCERT. THREE DAYS WITH PADDLING'S KINGS AT THE CURIOUS AND MIRACULOUS DEBUT OF ALTIUS EVENTS' REY DEL RIO WATERFALL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP REVEAL THE PROGRESS OF OUR SPORT, AND THE DEEPER BONDS THAT PROMISE TO PUSH IT FORWARD.

Machete Ready: Locals check out the rain-swollen Rey del Rio time trial and boatercross race course from the Zapatista-controlled side of the Agua Azul.



W

hat comes next?

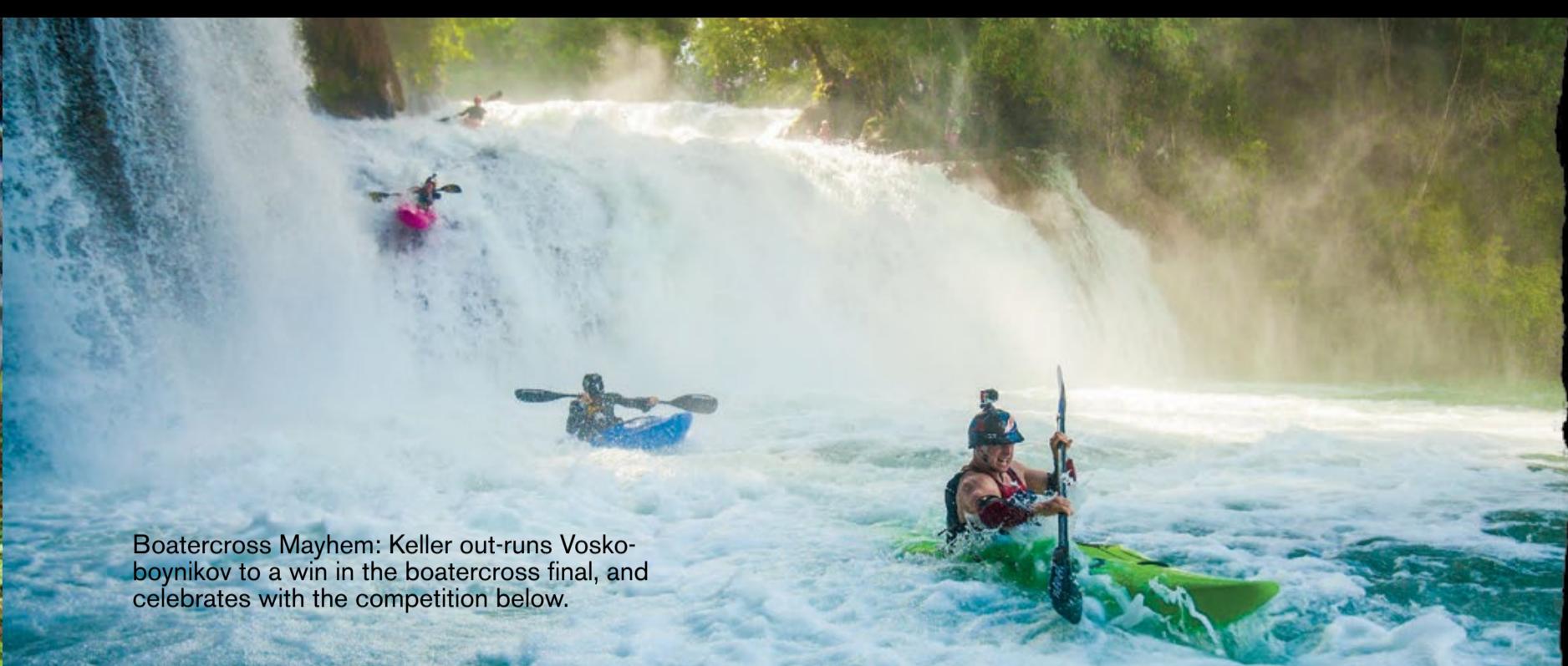
Pat Keller is contemplating just that, staring at the river-wide lip of a thundering 55-foot waterfall deep in southern Mexico's ungoverned jungle. He studies the turquoise motion, visualizing his final stroke, anticipating how the current will catch the edge of his prototype creek-race kayak. If he can connect his initial free-fall onto a mid-drop ledge, causing his boat to glance left, an exit flume of water just might point his bow into a safer landing that's now invisible in the cauldron of exploding mist.

If he wants to win this contest, he needs to do something new.

This is not the first time Keller has contemplated new. By his count, he's made "a dozen to 30" notable first descents since paddling his first kayak at age 7. A handful of kayakers have claimed as many firsts, won the same races, and executed equally dynamic lines in whitewater as difficult as the drop Keller is studying now. Nearly all of those paddlers are standing next to him, thinking through their own runs down the contest course's main drop, which is bookended by a pair of more manageable 30-foot falls. If they want to win this event, they will have to run these critical waterfalls with creativity and style. They too will need to push. They too will need to do something new.

Three huge drops. One run, one chance, one champion—that is, one Rey del Rio.





Boatercross Mayhem: Keller out-runs Vosko-boynikov to a win in the boatercross final, and celebrates with the competition below.

THE WATER LEVELS RAISE OBVIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF DEBUTING A HIGH-PROFILE EVENT ON SUCH DANGEROUS AND UNPREDICTABLE WHITEWATER, DURING THE HEIGHT OF MONSOON SEASON, IN JUNGLE CONTROLLED BY ZAPATISTA REBELS.

* * *

Billed as paddling's first-ever Waterfall World Championship, the event itself is the product of creativity and risk, a simple idea from two of the sport's most passionate athletes embraced by a Mexican entrepreneur known for turning action sports competitions into lavish entertainment spectacles on accelerated timelines. Athletes Rush Sturges and Rafa Ortiz pitched their vision for the next evolution of kayaking competition: a judged freeride contest driven by a course that would push paddling's most talented athletes to new levels. The desired course needed extreme features, and the ideal location was buried in equally extreme terrain, deep in the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas, on ground long claimed by the revolutionary Zapatista movement.

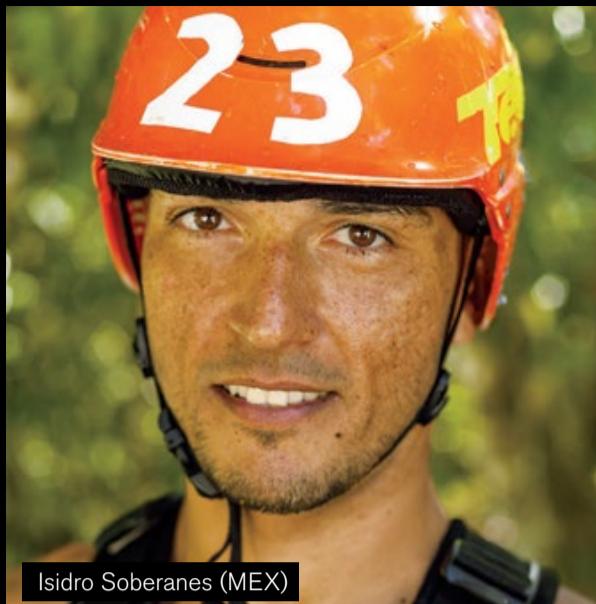
No investors, least of all the Mexican Tourism Board, want anything to do with the Zapatistas. So the entrepreneur, Altius Events owner Ernesto Rivas, crafted a more marketable event for viewers of a special Televisa network broadcast, located at one of the region's biggest tourist draws, a layer-caked series of waterfalls called the Cascadas de Agua Azul. If two days of made-for-TV competition went off without a hitch, no one would stop the kayakers from staging their own grassroots freeride event on the bigger drops a few miles downstream. Altius, with help from a couple kayakers, would organize the massive Rey del Rio production in less than a month.

As the field of 24 talented athletes arrives on flights from as far as Moscow and Rotorua, days of heavy late-November rain transform the normally tranquil blue cascades into a brown blur riven with terminal holes. Competitors struggle through practice runs; Ortiz himself is roped out of a sticky hydraulic. The high water raises obvious questions about the wisdom of debuting a high-profile event on such dangerous and unpredictable whitewater, during the height of monsoon season, in rebel-controlled jungle.

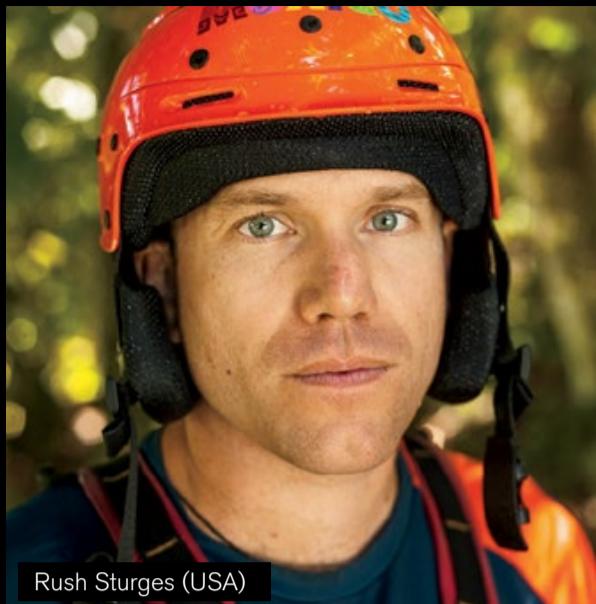
Yet the opening day of the event dawns clear. Blue skies mean blue water. Ortiz bounds up a stone walkway on the river's heavily developed right



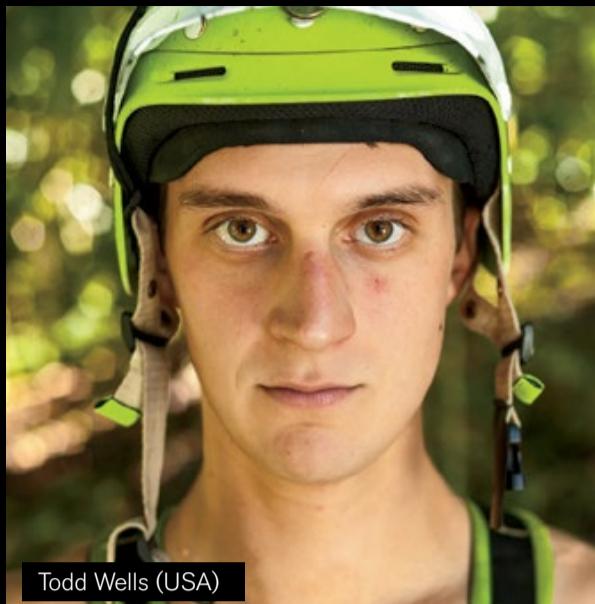
Daniel Badia / Db_photograph



Isidro Soberanes (MEX)



Rush Sturges (USA)



Todd Wells (USA)

bank, part of a Mexican national park. He smiles and laughs, fielding a barrage of questions in English and Spanish, playing roles as both racer and key organizational liaison to the Altius team. Sturges directs a small crew of videographers commissioned through his production company, River Roots, stationed on the opposite side of the river, which is controlled by the Zapatista community. A helicopter drone follows each competitor as they race the clock over a pair of travertine domes before a 15-foot vertical drop flowing into a sloping 40-foot finale.

A second clear day of dry weather and heated competition culminates in a final boatercross round pitting top qualifier Egor Voskoboinikov of Russia against Americans Keller, Dane Jackson, and Isaac Levinson. Voskoboinikov and Keller work different lines around the top island, only to reunite with a little bumping and grinding down the first slide. Keller sprints to a narrow lead and carries it over the final plunge.

In the finish pool, where rays of afternoon light cut through the canopy to illuminate the rising mist, Keller and his rivals share hugs and high fives. The hoots of other athletes echo over the cascades' roar as they leap into the cool water and throw gainers off the adjacent falls.

There's plenty to celebrate. No carnage. No waterfall landings onto other racers. No injuries. Even some early tension with the Zapatista community dissipates after Rivas negotiates an agreement for another day's access. Given all the variables of risk, the scene seems a little too perfect. Too serene. Too serendipitous.

No one speaks about the one invited competitor who is not here to share all this. The loss is only a week old; it must weigh heavily on these young men, some of whom shared a bond with him deeper than brotherhood. No one seems ready to think about that now. The blissed-over levels of stoke are too high, and besides,

there's a party waiting.

The athletes pile into vans for the ride to Palenque's outdoor events arena, where security teams usher the kayakers through the concrete complex to a VIP section overlooking an elaborate stage. On it, the Mexican-American pop duo Ha*Ash performs for throngs of locals who sing along with the sequined sister-act. They only go quiet for a set break, when an announcer leaps to introduce a stylish River Roots edit cut from the last two days on the Agua Azul. The crowd seems somewhat engaged by the bright boats and dynamic motion flashing on the Jumbotron, but doesn't make the full connection until the newly crowned Rey del Rio walks on stage to accept a giant novelty check straight out of *Happy Gilmore*. As Keller holds his \$3,000 prize above his head and gives out a holler, the crowd comes alive and fireworks kick the scene into full alternate-universe mode. Tonight, the kayakers truly are kings.

"So next-level," Levinson says, back



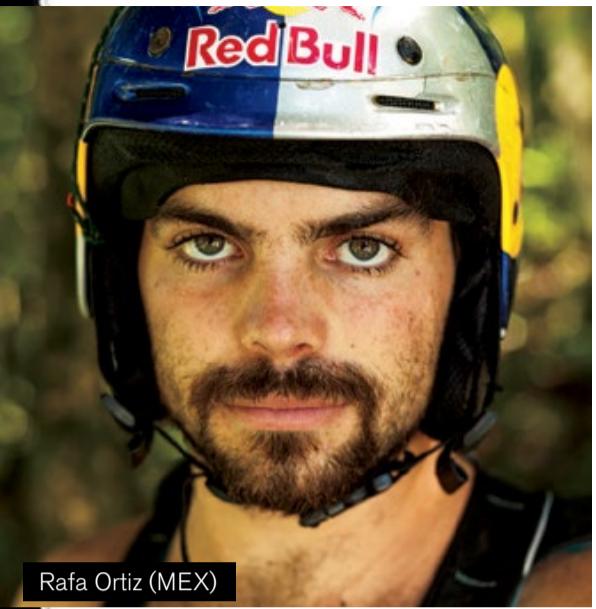
Iker Beristain Van Dusen (MEX)



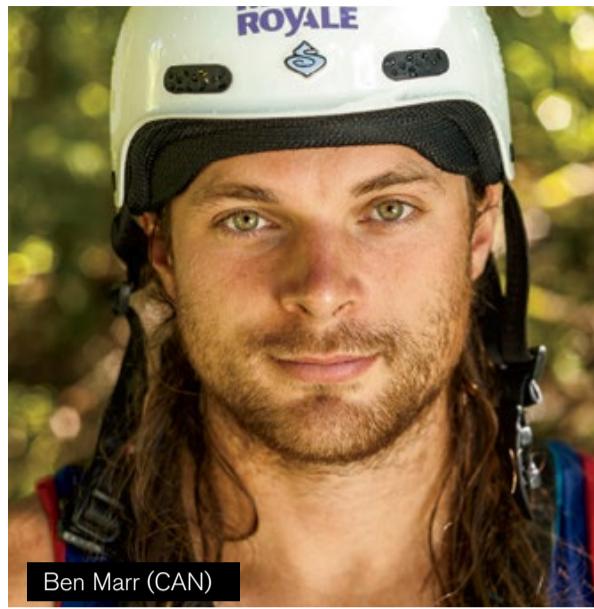
Dave Fusilli (USA)



Egor Voskoboinikov (RUS)



Rafa Ortiz (MEX)



Ben Marr (CAN)



Sam Sutton (NZ)

in the VIP section where he and the other kayakers are trying to make sense of having just stepped from a white-knuckle race to a room full of foreign dignitaries, gourmet cheeses, and as much top-shelf tequila as they can drink. This is far from the typical life of a professional kayaker—sleeping on friend's couches, in cars or on the ground, supplementing a few sponsor dollars with work driving nails, or guiding rafts. Dave Fusilli was digging graves at the snowy, bitter end of a Pennsylvania fall when he received his expenses-paid invitation to compete in Mexico. Now he's signing autographs and mugging for selfies with the teenage girls billowing over the crowd partition at the edge of the VIP section.

Fusilli didn't think twice about accepting this invitation. Stranger though, is that Spanish competitor Gerd Serrasoles, didn't think twice either. The next day's competition will mark his return to the stretch of

waterfalls where he drowned.

No one mentions this incident either, in which the swift action of Ortiz, Sturges and Evan Garcia, together with the unlikely presence of a helicopter deep in the Mexican bush, literally

hand-rolling up and separating him from his kayak. After Garcia chased down the body that floated out, he and Sturges applied CPR for four long minutes until Serrasoles coughed out a breath, and the chopper—on hand

to film the team's exploits—flew their near-lifeless friend to a hospital here in Palenque.

Nearly two years on, the memories haunt all involved. The least affected seems to be Serrasoles himself, who recovered from the incident and

immediately went on a tear, winning the AWP Whitewater World Series title and lapping one of the world's most consequential rapids, Site Zed on the Stikine. Still, his quiet demeanor hints

THERE'S PLENTY TO CELEBRATE. NO CARNAGE. NO WATERFALL LANDINGS ONTO OTHER RACERS. NO INJURIES. GIVEN ALL THE VARIABLES OF RISK, THE SCENE SEEMS A LITTLE TOO PERFECT. TOO SERENE. TOO SERENDIPITOUS.

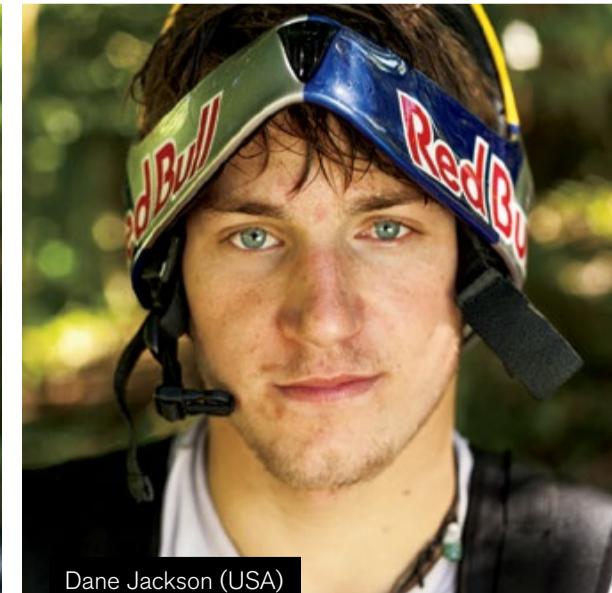
brought Serrasoles back from the dead. On one of the stretch's upper drops, Gerd tossed his paddle hoping for a smooth landing, only for the falls to hold him down, keeping him from



Pat Keller (USA)



Isaac Levinson (USA)



Dane Jackson (USA)



Risk and Reward: Chile's Marcos Gallegos lines up the double-point drop of the judged freeride event.

at the degree of risk surrounding the freeride event tomorrow.

But about that bottomless top-shelf tequila. This unique bro-hort is both close-knit and highly competitive. The day's events fanned those flames of one-upmanship, and a Saturday night open bar is gasoline on the blaze.

As the concert ends and parts of the group peel off for a fuller night's sleep, the shenanigans only accelerate in downtown Palenque. Suffice to say that this mixture of ante-upping personalities, young and restless, equal parts friend and rival, makes for a potent cocktail. The onlookers at Tropic Tacos would never imagine this spectacle would take place the night before a limit-pushing event that rewards risk in a place where most paddlers would certainly never imagine taking any. It's easy to chalk the night up to youth and machismo. Is it really that simple: a constant push for the next thrill or laugh? Do the consequences resonate at all, especially given what just happened to someone so connected to most of them?

The next morning the competitors are focused as they put in with a handful of safety kayakers at the Cascadas to paddle a few miles down to the larger falls. The film crew follows overland on a primitive trail leading past a wooden fence that marks a boundary where, "the people rule and the government obeys." The Zapatista movement gained notoriety 20 years ago, when masked gunmen took over towns and villages throughout Chiapas, including the area we're entering. After an initial bout of bloodshed, the Zapatistas and the federal Army settled into an uneasy stalemate, largely because government troops stay off of rebel land. Though

Athletes analyze footage of their runs on Gerd Serrasolses's camera; locals check out the final drop, which Fusilli (bottom right) fires off with half a paddle.





I've heard that the movement has shifted its emphasis from armed resistance to more peaceful forms of advocacy, the exposure feels palpable as we cross the barrier and two young men with machetes approach the crew. Israel Celis Mesura, the fixer who has accompanied countless kayak expeditions across Mexico, launches into a heated exchange with the men. The tension rises as they grab the box holding the drone-copter. Turns out they just want a little work. They lug the giant box past their rustic subsistence community and help hack a path to the edge of the falls.

Gone are the tourists, the endless souvenir stands and empanada shacks. Here there are no neon-colored MEXICO banners provided by the national tourism board, and no flak-jacketed members of the regional *Policía Ciudadana y Popular* strutting about with shoulder-slung assault rifles. Today it's only the river and a select group gazing down at the series of high-volume, river-wide vertical falls, contemplating tough questions. How best to safely bring something new to the table? How to bring style to three back-to-back waterfalls, any one of which could at the least, break your back?

The last begs a question everyone has been discussing the last couple days: How do you quantify style objectively? James Byrd, the mastermind of Idaho's North Fork Championship, the top-ranking kayak competition in the minds of this inner circle of athletes, has been flown in to answer that very question. He'll settle the tough questions, such as "What if I break my nose but nail my line?" from Galen Volckhausen.

As the athletes gather under thick shade trees overlooking the middle drop, Byrd and the athletes have just finalized the scoring system. Ortiz explains: Each of the three drops will be judged and scored separately on a 50-point scale, broken down into five separate 10-point categories, including three that define style (Approach, Free-fall and Landing), one for Flow, and a final bonus category for Progression. The more difficult middle drop's score will be doubled, creating a total of 200 possible points.

There's still a lot to weigh and add up. A missed trick on the first drop could set up a low score, or worse, on the difficult middle drop. Tossing your paddle on the big 'un could mean a safer entry, or a loss of Flow points as you carp a hand-roll or grope for your paddle.

EVEN WITH THE DEFINED SCORING STRUCTURE, THE BIGGEST JUDGMENT FACTOR REMAINS A PERSONAL ONE: EACH PADDLER MUST GAUGE THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SENDING HIMSELF INTO FREE-FALL OBLIVION.

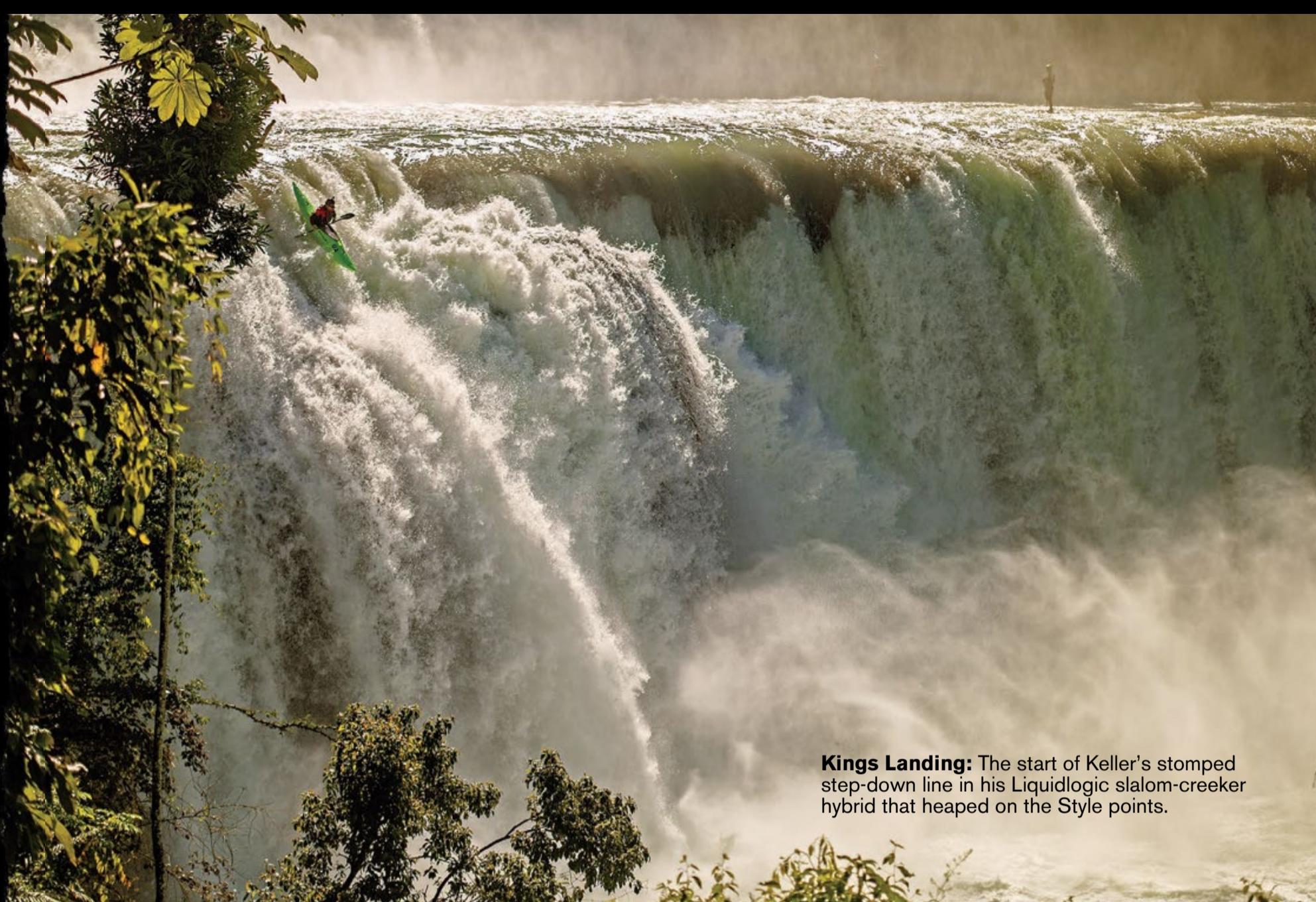
Even with the defined structure, the biggest judgment factor remains a personal one. Each paddler must gauge the perceived impact of sending himself into free-fall oblivion over a massive 50-plus-foot drop.

Byrd tells me his main interest is pushing kayaking forward. If one person lands a new trick, he says, four more are likely to follow. As the field self-selects into 14 takers, running in the reverse order of their time-trial finishes, the process unfolds just as Byrd hoped. Gerd Serrasolles's younger brother Aniol and then Volckhausen kick off their runs with back freewheels on the first drop (paddling off the lip backward and rotating to a nose-first entry). That causes Ben Marr to scrap his plan to run the first drop straight, and throw a trick instead. Sturges ups the ante with a huge crossbow stroke off the big drop and a last-second decision to add a barrel-rolling kick-flip before the lip of the last waterfall, setting up a back freewheel off of it.

The big drop commands everyone's respect. New Zealander Sam Sutton tosses his paddle and tucks for a smoother entry, yet the deck-to-face impact still breaks his nose. Others hold onto their paddles and pay the price; Gerd Serrasolles and Fusilli both break their paddles and charge over the last falls with single blades. However they approach the entry, every paddler chooses the same channelized line over the middle waterfall, seeking a vertical entry into the landing pool's most aerated water.

Each competitor, that is, except for Keller. As the paddlers return





Kings Landing: The start of Keller's stomped step-down line in his Liquidlogic slalom-creeker hybrid that heaped on the Style points.

to the rim after their runs to discuss lines, compare notes and watch the proceedings, Keller sits quietly in the shade, studying the middle drop. The weather is holding. Overhead sun illuminates a rainbow in the rising mist that bridges the steep jungle walls girding this pristine series of falls, which the area's indigenous Maya people call Bolom-Ahau, or The Nine Kings. Keller, looking to keep his claim to the crown, launches a risky front freewheel off the top drop into a backward landing. Then he muscles his way right, toward the edge of the big drop and the novel step-down line he's premeditated. It goes as he imagined: He rebounds off the lower ledge that directs him into a landing zone that no one else entertained, emerging from the spray of the falls with a pumped fist to whistles from high on the cliffs above.

“**T**oday for some reason worked out,” Ortiz announces to the group awaiting the results back in Palenque. “Somehow water levels were perfect, somehow the sun came out, and everyone paddled perfectly, with no injuries aside from Sam’s nose. So I’m super stoked, and I just feel for some reason that Juanito was there for us. He was up there for all of us.”

Juanito. Ortiz finally acknowledges the elephant in the room. Juan Antonio de Ugarte, a friend to nearly everyone here, who drowned just 10 days earlier at the base of a Chilean waterfall. The moment of silence that follows pulls the competitors inward. It lingers. It becomes longer, aware moments. It brings back heavy emotions buried just under the surface.

When Jackson speaks of Juanito, the emotions boil right up. He learned of his friend’s death three days before the

biggest first descent of his already storied paddling career, Encanto Falls in Mexico’s Veracruz region. Pushing back his grief, Jackson crossed the violent boil-line at the lip, intending to knife vertically into the pool below. Instead, his boat stayed almost horizontal. He’d boofed it, falling more than 120 feet to a flat landing.

“I was ready for a broken back, ready for a colossal ridiculous hit,” says Jackson, who got a smidge forward and absorbed a violent ejection upon impact. But it wasn’t until the adrenaline spike subsided, long after the shock of being uninjured wore off, when Jackson left the river and thought again of Juanito, that the descent scared him.

Now, holding back tears, Jackson struggles to make sense of Juanito’s death on the Nilahue River in Chile. “There’s been probably over 100 runs on that drop, and everyone knows about that cave on the left,” Jackson says of the 60-foot Salto del Nilahue waterfall. “And he was with a great crew too, really in good



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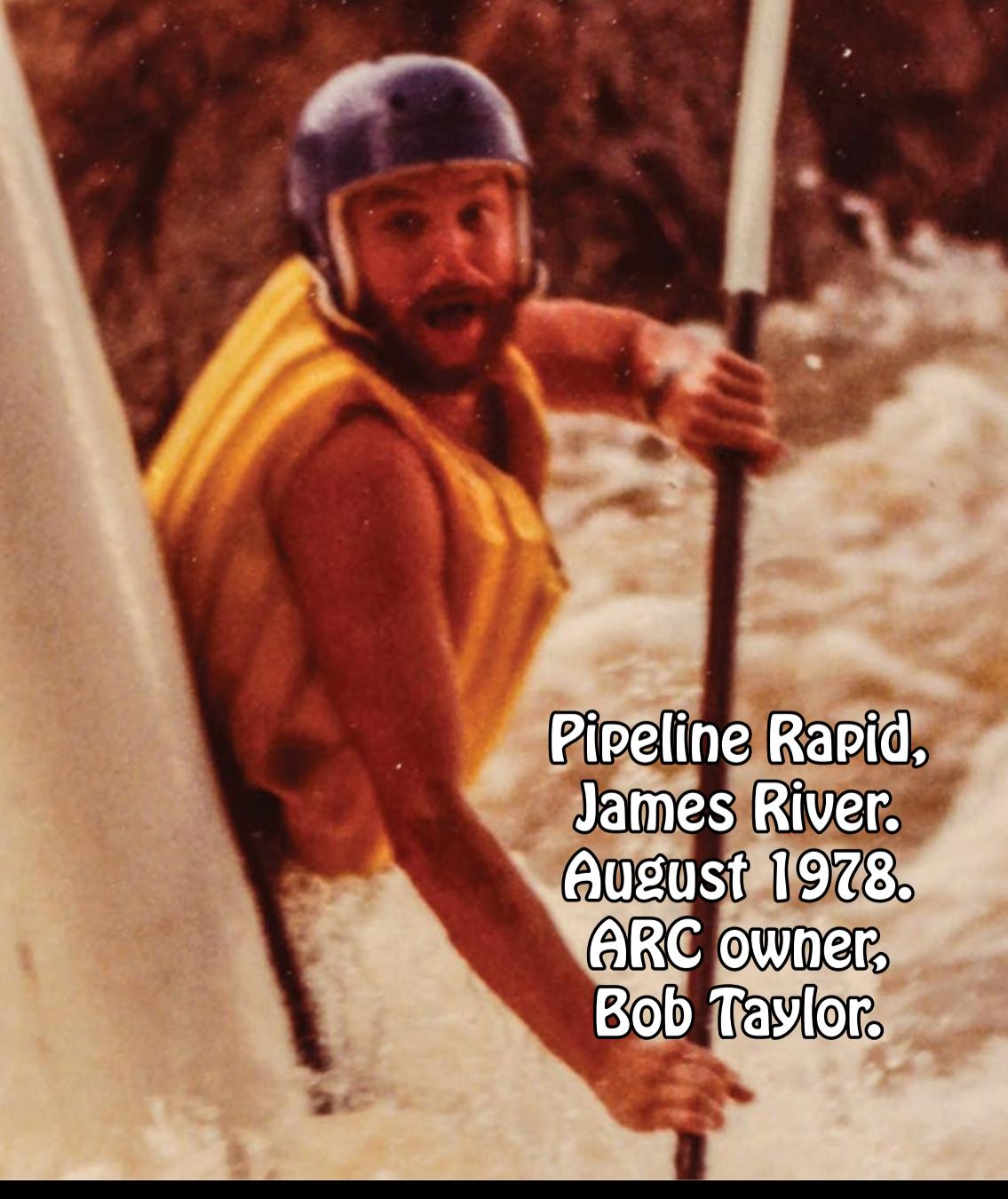
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Martin and his folding canoe,
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Full Circle

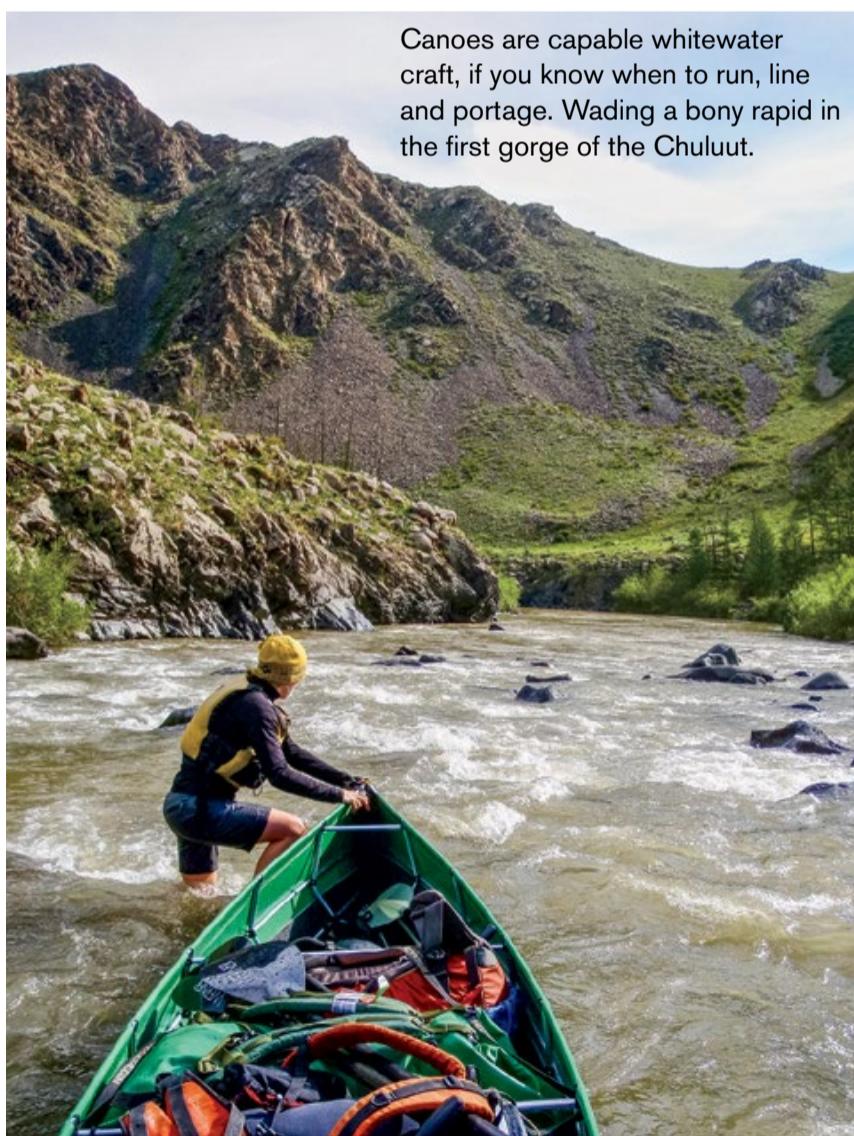
BY ZAND B. MARTIN

A round-the-world canoe
journey reveals the roundabout
future of canoe-tripping

PHOTOS BY ZAND B. MARTIN & BRIA SCHURKE

**Animal Encounters:**

These Bactrian camels on the Upper Chuluut River provide Mongolian families with milk, meat, wool and transportation.



Canoes are capable whitewater craft, if you know when to run, line and portage. Wading a bony rapid in the first gorge of the Chuluut.



We notice it together: a low, bass-rumble we feel deep in our chests, but cannot yet hear. The air is calm, the water a pane of chocolate that speaks of flood. Peaks and taiga reflect in the turbid flow, but we are the only thing that moves. Two nights before, we were sitting in a log house as a miniature *babushka* plied us with tea and raspberries from the yard. She asked us of our plans, and when we mentioned the Vitim River, she shook her head and scowled. Pointing to a wall calendar open to a photograph of a tropical waterfall, she gave us each a long, sharp look.

I'd spent much of the previous four years canoeing across three continents. I'd met hundreds of people, and seen skepticism and dire warnings expressed in a dozen languages and all manner of gesture. I smiled across the table at Bria Schurke, my partner on this stretch of the expedition from Mongolia to the sea. The old woman's reaction was just another piece in a puzzle comprised primarily of 30-year-old Soviet Red Army survey maps and a Cossack journal from the 17th century. The Cossacks—Russia's voyageurs—had deemed the river too swift for trade, and abandoned it to seek other routes.

The Evenki word *taksimo* means bowl or cup. Days later, in the gray filtered light of a too-early morning, we see the land rise around us and understand why they named this place as they did. I imagine a great fist slamming into the mountain dough, punching down this flat, conifer-choked crater amidst the nameless ridges of east-central Siberia. As we reach the far side of this giant granitic cereal bowl, the river spills out into a 500-mile gorge, and we have little clue what lies within its walls.

The river is in flood. Long before dawn, our 'alarm cord' tugged on the tent as the rising current reached our canoe and tried to sweep it away. Our sandbar was awash. We loaded quickly, ate dry bread, and pushed off.

The Gates of the Vitim rise ahead,

ridge on ridge with no hint of where the 100,000 cfs of murky water beneath us will go. The roar increases, and we begin to see hints of a current; the channel narrows from a mile wide to 300 feet, and the first mountain spurs reach down to the river. The rumble rises to our ears, and we paddle in silence. The river bends, and we move toward a small, innocuous eddy on river-left. As we approach, it grows to the size of a football field, guarded by a meter-high eddy wall and a minefield of boat-sized whirlpools spinning into deeper water. The scale here, as in all of Siberia, is way off. There are tributaries of tributaries in this part of the world with flows greater

Oregon to Portland, Maine, leading expeditions for NOLS to scratch together the money to paddle east for another month or two, failing and struggling and making my way across the continent. Europe followed, and Central Asia. Mostly I canoed; occasionally I resorted to bicycling for the sake of sanity, and to cross deserts and mountain ranges.

As each leg materialized out of the mist of possibility, I cast about for structure and for ending. Siberia emerged as the keyhole through which I could glimpse the great ocean where I had begun, years before and as a different person. The maps of Siberia told of capillaries of blue etched amidst mountains and wedged between the steppe and the sea. From the dizzy soar of Google Earth, I sketched a route through the difficult and the unknown. Still, it was all sort of a dream.

I am addicted to setting and achieving big goals. Canoes are very effective vehicles in which to pursue those goals. I feel something in a boat hull I cannot quite explain, and that the scientist in me shudders to name. Trying to boil down one's feelings on the subject of expeditionary canoe and kayak travel is impossible. Walking a Siberian portage trail, I race backwards and forwards through my story, and the story of this foolish, niche game so many of us play.

WHAT'S NEXT

Trying to predict the next evolution in expedition canoeing is like guessing what grandma is going to make for dinner: You've probably seen it before. After all, herds of wooly mammoth were roaming the earth when the canoe was middle-aged. Even if we've seen most of it before, it's fascinating to think how new generations of paddlers will combine those common ingredients.

Superficially, we are going to see a lot more big international trips on the cutting edge that blend urban, side-country, and wilderness, and that take their cues from natural frontiers—mountain ranges and

ONE OF THE HARDEST QUESTIONS FOR MOST EXPEDITION PADDLERS TO ANSWER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT: WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

than the Mississippi.

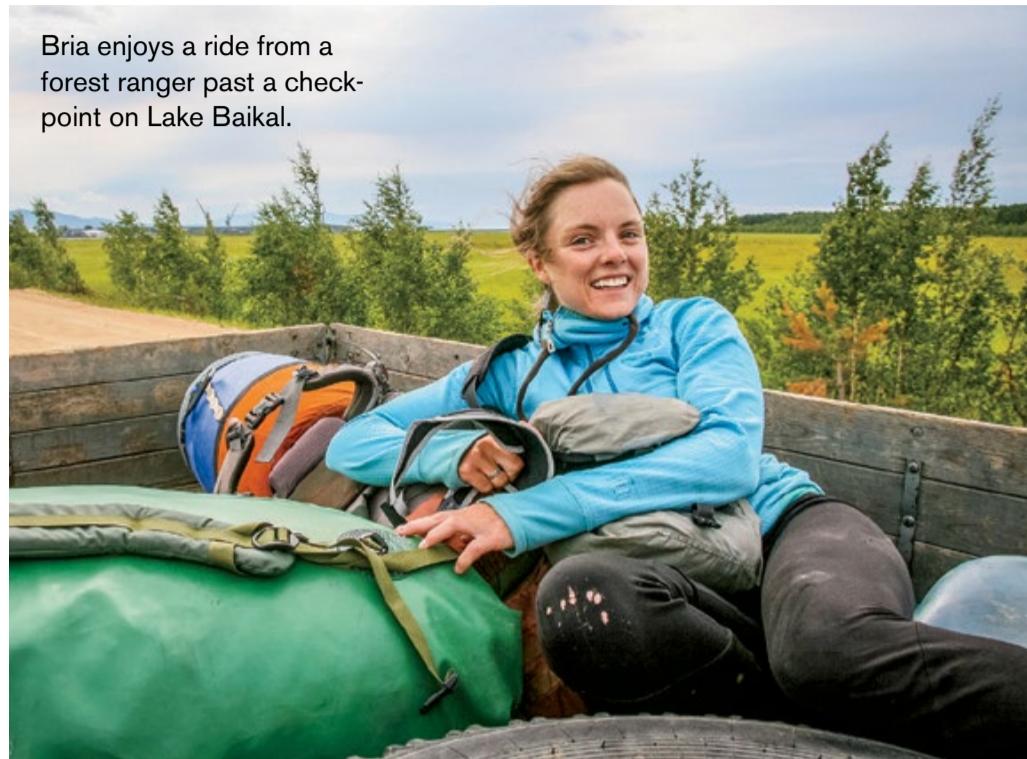
It is our last chance. We punch the eddyline and swing in, the folding canoe flexing with the conflicting forces. We scramble ashore and climb the banks for a better view. Downriver, the flow pinches into a roaring chute so vast its end is lost in distance and mist.

We carry on a forest track. Amid moments of rhythm and blankness, I consider our task. We are two Americans, alone in the middle of Siberia, with a canoe and limited knowledge of what lies ahead. The only recourse is to laugh. We have cast ourselves in an expedition comedy of endless variation.

The mere idea of paddling around the world is laughable, especially when it starts as the damn-fool idea of a just-out-of-college and jobless person (me) without the resources or the skills to bring it about. I started with a paddle home, from Portland,



A reprovisioning run on the BAM railway, which cuts through a wilderness the size of Canada.



Bria enjoys a ride from a forest ranger past a checkpoint on Lake Baikal.

watersheds—rather than political borders. We'll see more trips that combine activities, such as canoe- and kayak-supported skiing, mountaineering, and hiking, of course, and all manner of adventures built around packrafts. These ultra-light paddlecraft are *the* game-changer in extended backcountry expeditions.

For adventurous spirits who still may require a bit of structure, we will—hopefully—see water trails and the idea of 'through-paddling' gain traction. The stunning Northern Forest Canoe Trail is the model here, and we should see these 'named routes' become more popular. This, beyond any other trend in our sport, is something the outdoor industry should get behind.

CONNECTION

A few weeks before we passed through the Gates of the Vitim, while camped on an island on the Selenge River in Mongolia, hundreds of miles from the nearest Internet connection, I used my satellite link to post an update to Facebook that included my geographical coordinates. Within minutes my brother texted me, suggesting I check out a sandy beach on the other side of the island. I explored it while waiting for the photos I'd taken that day to upload onto my iPad. For those on the cutting edge of expedition paddling, it has become de rigueur to post daily to social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram,

“IN 300 MILES, WE PASS A DOZEN LONELY CABINS AND A SOVIET-ERA GOLD MINING CAMP, ALL SLOWLY BEING CONSUMED BY THE TAIGA.”

and build a narrative of their exploration online for all to see and interact with.

Of course, for millennia people have disappeared into the bush to find peace and solitude. In our technological age, we need that distance more than ever, and extended wilderness expeditions are an excellent way to build a healthy relationship with technology. When leading NOLS courses,

I place the highest value on creating an isolated community pursuing challenging goals in the outdoors—in other words, I insist my students unplug. But the focus of those courses is the team members, not the larger paddling community.

This is a very personal matter, and it's easy to offend. The science is starting to tell us some fascinating things about what screen time does to the brain, especially the adolescent brain. I am conflicted about the direction things go, but as in all things, the team must clarify and reduce their goals, they must crystallize what each member is looking for. When we hear about some quiet warrior out in the wilderness crushing miles and blazing routes with no care for media exposure and some phrase muttered to a local paper denigrating "the damn TweetBook," we respond with respect and awe. I hope we always have these people in the community, but I'm not sure they're pushing the expedition world forward. Those that weave a digital narrative for the rest of us before, during, and after the experience add inspiration and momentum. They're enablers.



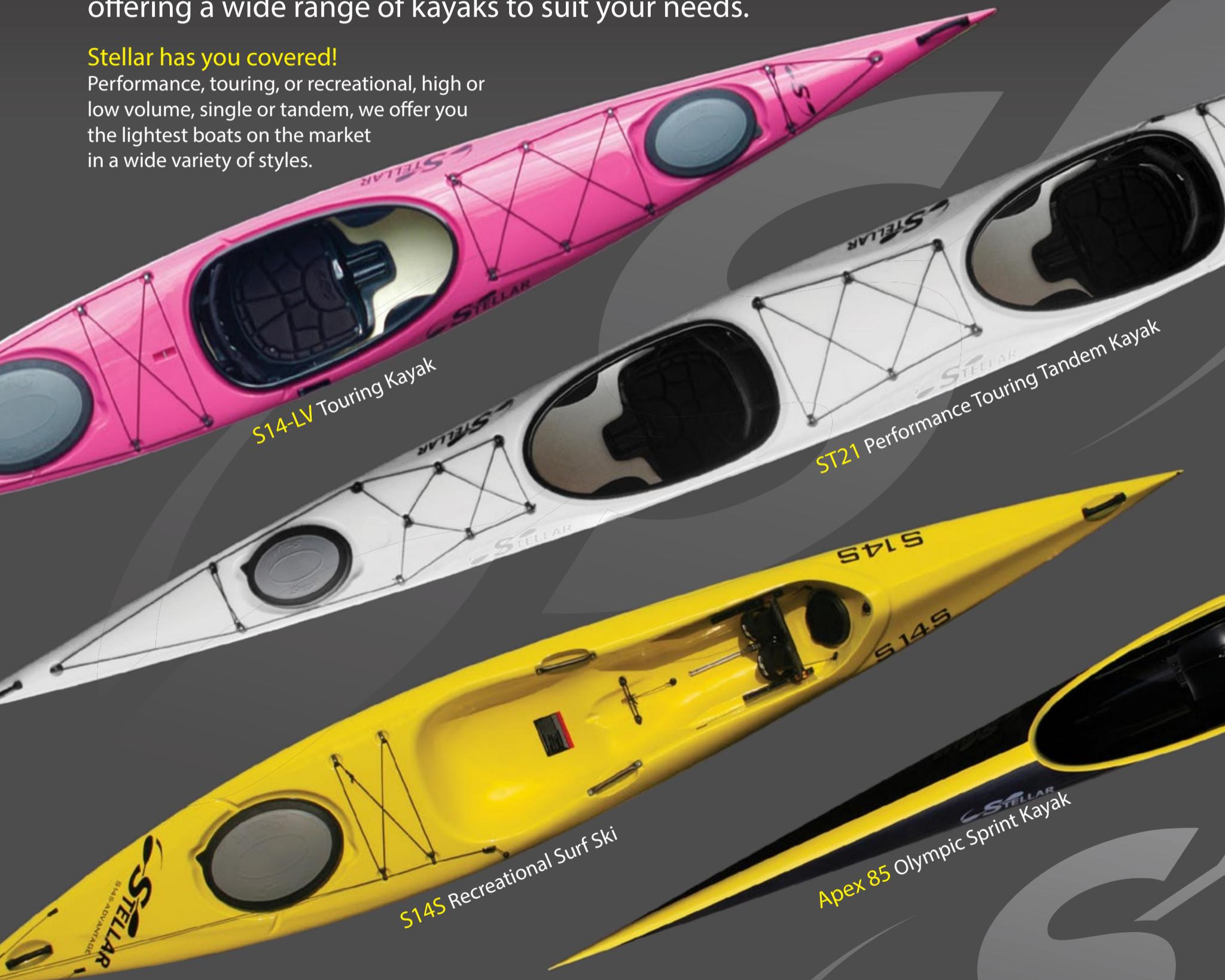
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Inland Sea: A surf landing on Baikal.



WHITEWATER

Canoes can go anywhere, and should. They are the original expedition vehicle, and excel in moving people and loads thousands of miles through rough, trackless terrain. They also work great on French canals, urban rivers, and, yes, in challenging moving water. I mean more than actual classed moving water here. I am talking about an attitude toward hitting every point on your skill checklist—portage, line, wade, open water, and run—often all in the same day.

Whitewater is where poor self-awareness comes to die. You can hide a low skill level for hundreds of miles on all kinds of water, but playing in that first drop, it becomes apparent who has the training and experience, and who doesn't. A certain kind of canoeing is very easy, and plenty of paddlers have put up huge trips with only basic skills. There is no one best way, but exposing yourself to professional instruction and skilled boaters certainly won't hurt.

Canoe culture, particularly in America, is kept alive by a nostalgic Tilley hat generation clustered around a handful of old-society camps. We've learned that nostalgia is not a sufficient foundation on which to build a community or a movement. I have spoken with a lot of graybeards that puzzle over the low participation numbers amongst young people, and industry players that bemoan dropping sales numbers. It would seem so simple: You need the camps, and the family trips, but you also need to go play in the afternoon with your friends and do technical day-runs with your uncle and you need to see people in magazines and online in big water too. Sometimes, you need to see people doing these things on long expeditions in remote places.

In a perfect future, we would not only have spectacular media and local play-parks, but also well-led and well-equipped outdoor programs in every middle and high school in the United States. The Germans have beer gardens at their posh, downtown canoe clubs.

THANK YOU

President Obama, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, BLM Director Neil Kornze, Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, Senator Michael Bennet and former Senator Mark Udall

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Disassembling the boat at Vitim village as smoke from massive forest fires engulfs the area.



PURPOSE

Why is expedition canoeing important? We heap layers of meaning on it as it connects us to childhood memories or philosophical ideas of natural connection, but from the outside looking in, it is just recreation. One of the hardest questions for most expedition paddlers to answer is the most important: Why are you doing this? There aren't very many good answers. If you expect to secure grants, sponsorship, and media exposure, consider this aspect very carefully.

Our recreation has a lot of meaning for us, but to drive value to anyone outside of the expedition team, we have to tell our story in a dynamic, engaging way. Building an expedition around a meaningful, focused issue of conservation awareness, charity fundraising, or youth engagement is vital now, and it will be in the future.

FULL CIRCLE

We end the two and a half-mile portage sweaty and tired, with nerves still jangled from the power of the unknown, and the ever-present thunder of 65,000 cfs of cold floodwater pummeling through a steep, boreal version of Lava Falls. Boulders click and rumble along the bed surface, giving evidence of an awesome, unsettling power. The portage was slow, the portage track eroded and flooded out. In tight-chested wonder, we load and move downstream.

A day and a half of low pressure brings the clouds to earth and weaves them into green hillsides. Wind and rain scour a primeval landscape of larch and scree.

We average 80 miles a day for the next eight days, riding the crest of the flood. In 300 miles, we pass a dozen lonely cabins and a Soviet-era gold mining camp, all slowly being consumed by the taiga. Then the Vitim drops 18 inches overnight; the downward trend begins. Beaches appear, trees rise from the depths, and the confused, flooded malevolence begins to dissipate.

Moving north, we talk about canoe trips. Bria grew up outside of Ely, and I in New England; this is not our first voyage. It is, by all accounts, an odd canoe trip. Tibetan Buddhist stupas on riverbanks, cans of horsemeat on bare, dusty shelves, and only the vaguest sense of the lessons we will learn, and what will come next.

After 548 days, more than 15,000 miles and 28 countries, Martin reached Pacific tidewater at Nikolayevsk-na-Amure, Russia, on August 15, 2013. By ski, foot, bicycle, and, mainly, canoe, he crossed North America, Europe and Asia.



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GOING

Testing crossover

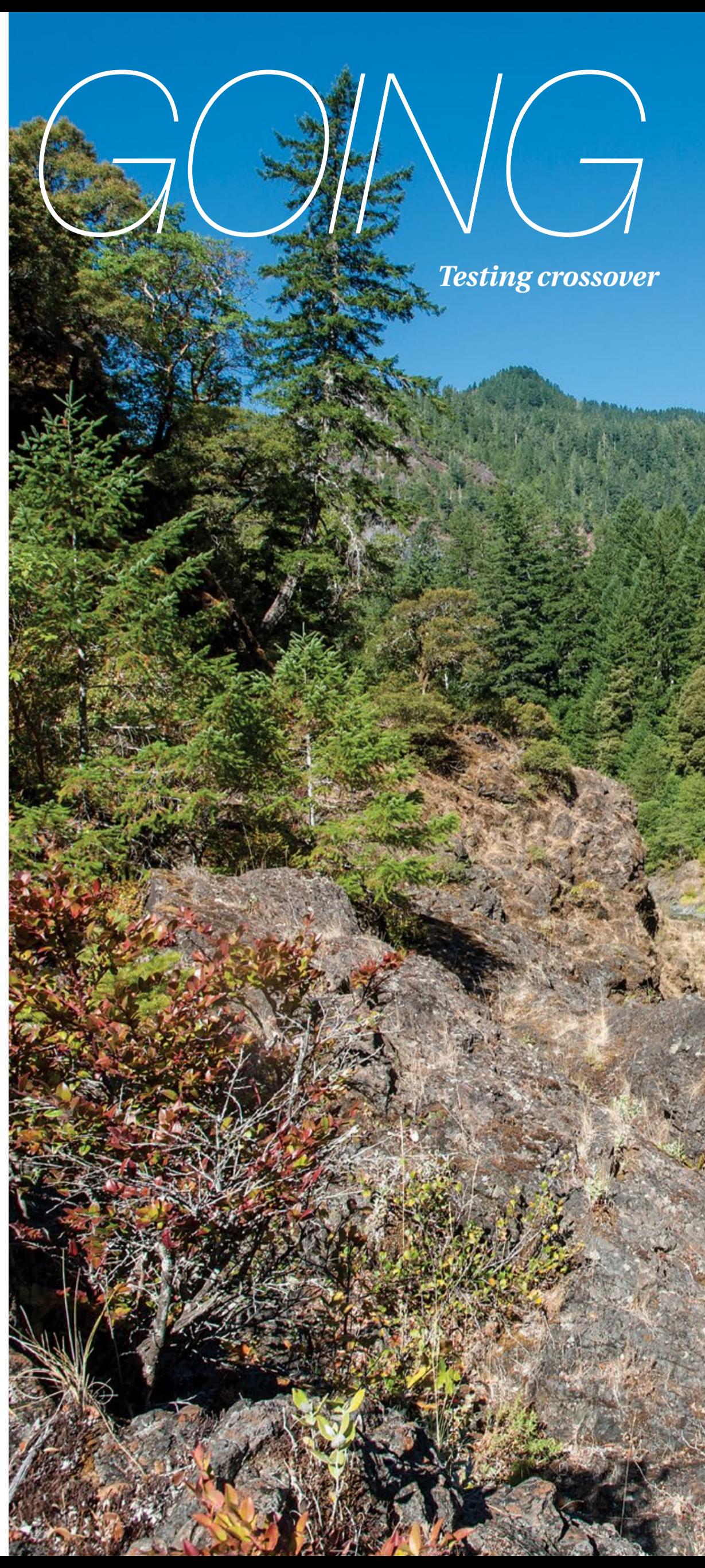
The Wild and Scenic stretch of Oregon's Lower Rogue could well be defined as a crossover river. Ambling miles of emerald Class II punctuated with whoop-worthy Class III (and the occasional Class IV drop) make it a perfect place for beginner whitewater boaters to cross into the intermediate range. This heavenly protected stretch made famous by the likes of author Zane Grey and Meryl Streep (a la *The River Wild*) also toes the line between rugged and luxurious. Deep in the canyon, outfitters such as Rogue Wilderness Adventures serve rib-eye steaks to clients reclining on inflatable couches.

This dichotomous stretch of river was the perfect testing ground for a quiver of four crossover kayaks. Our group of C&K staffers and regular contributors spent three long summer days on the Rogue, evaluating how each of these boats would serve as a do (almost) everything river craft. Over these 34 low-stress miles we sprinted in flatwater, dropped the crossovers' retractable skegs to drift, peeled in and out of every eddy, and left no riffle unsurfed. In the evenings, we compared notes over delicious local craft brew from Ninkasi. After we left the Wild and Scenic section, we kept right on testing, with a few days on other stretches of the Rogue. One boat got an extended test on the Grand Canyon, and another has been getting salty on a regular basis.

Though manufacturers have built kayaks capable of crossing over from the flats for decades, a recent design surge has resulted in more feature-laden kayaks ready to load down and level up. By nature, building a longboat to do many things well will inevitably involve sacrifice: If you want more speed, you have to sacrifice primary stability. Want a better boof? Lose some tracking. Conventional wisdom holds that a boat that does everything adequately rarely does anything well. This generation of crossover boats challenges that notion. And it's not just aspirational boaters who should take notice. Their gnar-boating brethren now have bigger whitewater-ready options for technical wilderness multi-days.



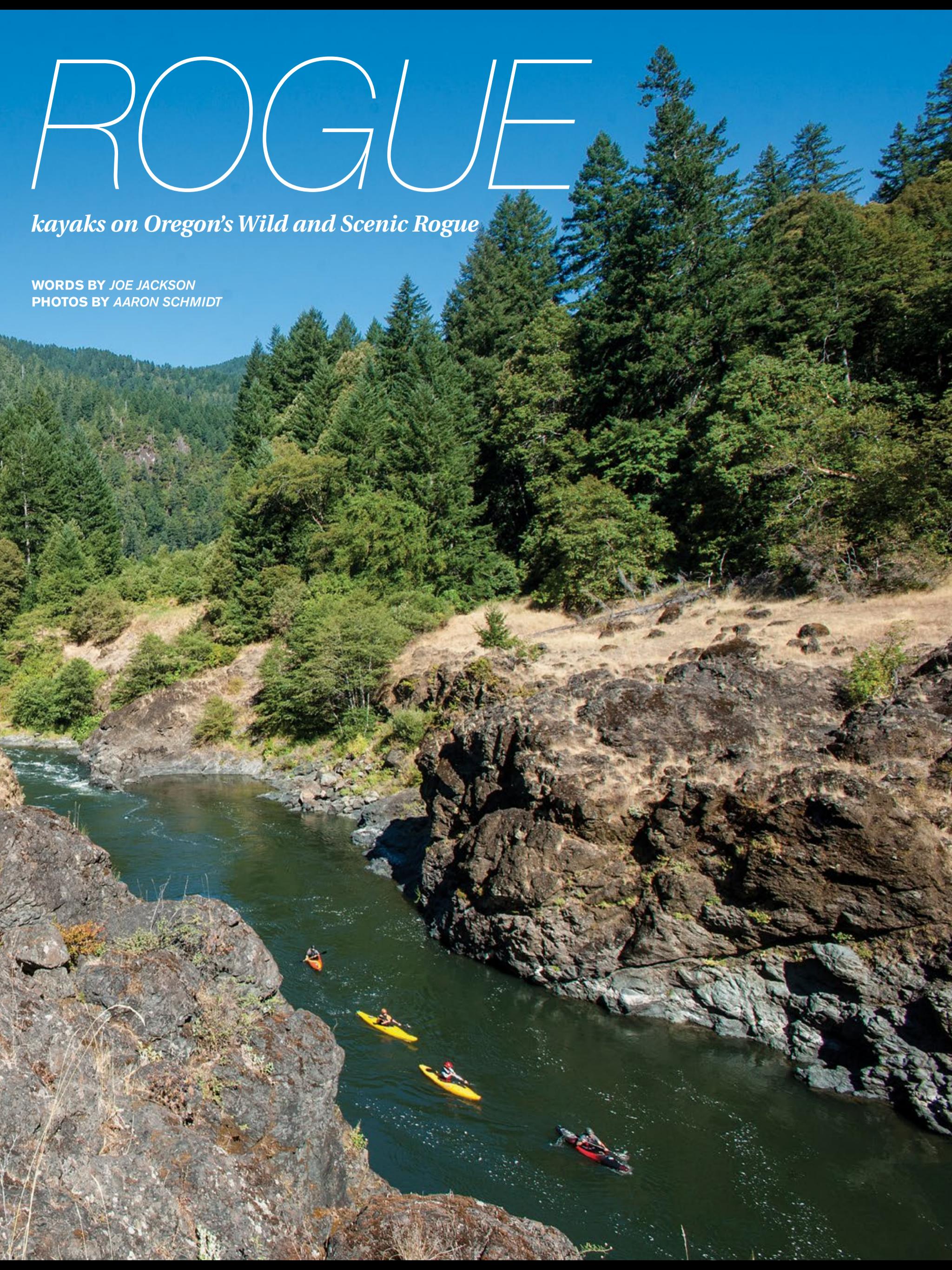
For more on the Rogue River and these crossover kayaks, go to canoekayak.com



ROGUE

kayaks on Oregon's Wild and Scenic Rogue

WORDS BY JOE JACKSON
PHOTOS BY AARON SCHMIDT





JACKSON KARMA RG

L: 11'10"; W: 25"; 94 gals., 58 lbs.
(\$1,299, jacksonkayak.com)

The “RG” in this crossover’s name is intentionally ambiguous. It can stand for Rock Gardener—think big-water ocean play—or River Guide. Though the hull is an elongated take on Jackson Kayak’s popular Karma river-runner, our testers agreed that it felt most like a sea kayak of any boat tested. (The RG earned high marks during extracurricular testing in ocean surf and sea caves.) With a generous 11-foot-10-inch inseam the RG is more than a foot and a half longer than the rest of the fleet, with a narrower, less-edgy hull that provides noticeably less primary stability. The length killed this boat’s boof-ability, but hot damn was the RG fast on the flats. The 9.375-inch rear hatch was the smallest circumference of any test boat—making larger overnight gear items a tougher stuff into the stern storage space. Yet it proved incredibly dry and sturdy during some violent boater-less downtime below Rainie Falls (the run’s toughest drop) after an unexpected swim (What? I was testing the hatch!). The RG had by far our favorite deck rigging with hearty bungees on both bow and stern, plus two extra handles behind the cockpit, should a water rescue be necessary.



PYRANHA FUSION

**L: 10'3"; W: 26"; 81 gals., 46 lbs., also available in S and M
(\$999, pyranha.com)**

"Sometimes this feels like a big Burn!" exclaimed one happy Class V boater, and fan of Pyranha's carve-y flat-bottomed creekboat, as he leaned it onto one of the Fusion's hard chines and ripped out of an eddy into Class III Lower Black Bar Falls. While the Fusion was built off the less edgy Karnali, when sized up against the soft-chined Karma RG, this crossover felt extremely grippy on edge. Two channels down the middle of the hull had the Fusion tracking the best of the 10-foot boats tested even when the Fusion's deep, thin skeg was not deployed. "It feels like I'm sitting in a Cadillac," said one tester, noting the lack of a leg-separating central pillar—which provided a roomy feel despite a cockpit smaller than the Katana and Ethos. The hatch cover required some elbow grease to get on and off, which made for challenging access to stored contents on the water. Testers did not, however, complain about the bone-dry contents after a day paddling with multiple rolls. Squeezing gear directly behind the seat was difficult, but also not a huge issue given the ample 78 liters of space beyond the rear bulkhead, plus simple access to the extra bow storage in front of the foot panel.





WAVE SPORT ETHOS 10

**10'3"; W: 27"; 100 gals., 54 lbs., also available in L
(\$1,085, wavesport.com)**

"This is definitely the boat I'd take on Class V," said one tester, who happened to grease the Class V boof line at Rainie Falls in the Ethos. Credit that sure rough-water agility to the hull's relatively flat bottom and aggressive rocker profile, which kept us above smaller holes, and a low-profile bow that punched the big 'uns. While its whitewater chops were among the highest rated on our Rogue test, the 10-foot-3 Ethos added smart comfort extras headlined by the highly adjustable CORE Whiteout outfitting system that allowed testers to ratchet our thighs up tight—sharing top honors for hip security with the Katana. Testers loved details like a drain-plug on the cockpit's back corner, making an intuitive drain on a shoulder carry. Speaking of which, the weighty Ethos was a bear to portage, but testers did appreciate that they could swing the hip pad out to the cockpit—providing cushion for the 54-pound (un-packed) boat. We also noted the lack of rigging capabilities (a single bungee X on the stern deck), which only helped prove the point that the ethos of the Ethos is simple: svelte whitewater performance.



DAGGER KATANA

**L: 10'4; W: 27.25" 104 gals., 56 lbs., also available in 9'4" length
(\$1,105, dagger.com)**

"This is the boat I want on trips when I need my creature comforts, like a bigger tent and some beer," said one hedonistic tester as he easily popped out the front bulkhead to reveal ample bow storage. The Katana was the widest and highest-riding crossover in the fleet, and had the best primary stability. Nonetheless, it sliced through eddies and turned on a dime in current thanks to its hard chines. This 10-foot-4-incher had the largest cockpit of the group, requiring a larger sprayskirt. On top of the space for entry ease, testers' knees also sat higher in the Katana cockpit, which definitely adds to its merits as an aspirational whitewater boat—testers noted that it felt the least claustrophobic for paddlers new to hard-shell confinement. The heavily built Contour Ergo outfitting was the most comfortable that we tested but did not do the Katana any favors in terms of weight (a full 10 pounds heavier than the Fusion in spite of having relatively similar size dimensions). The Katana's 27.25-inch width accompanied by its large deck made the 104-gallon kayak the toughest to roll out of these boats. But with that said, it was also the toughest to flip upside-down.



FINDERS BEEPEERS

Unplug assured with a 406-mhz Personal Locator Beacon

BY ZAK PODMORE

If you're looking for a low-maintenance, economical device that will get your coordinates to authorities in a last-resort situation, ACR's **ResQLink+** (2) and McMurdo's **Fast Find 220** (4) are good options. Both beacons are waterproof, require no service subscription and guarantee a battery shelf-life of six years. The disadvantage is that these are all-or-nothing devices, leaving no room for communicating with search and rescue beyond the initial call for help.

The Fast Find 220 comes with a floating pouch and has the lowest price tag of the four devices tested (**\$249**, mcmurdomarine.com). It's a single-use device—you snap off the red cover to expose the antenna and the "on" button, which will activate your distress signal. Meanwhile, the ResQLink+ floats on its own, and

ACR will replace it if used in an emergency situation. But be careful: The button with the power symbol sends the distress button. If you turn this unit on, the helicopter is on the way (acrartex.com, **\$280**).

SPOT's Gen3 (1) device is the latest from one of the best-recognized names in the PLB market. Its tracking feature allows you to post coordinates to an online map at regular intervals, and the 'Check In' button provides peace of mind for your pre-programmed contacts. Since emergencies come in all degrees of severity, the Gen3 allows you to request help in non-life threatening situations or to call in the search and rescue cavalry. (findmespot.com, **\$170 plus service plan starting at \$15/month, annual contract required**).

DeLorme's inReach Explorer (3) rounded out the group with its feature-rich display and Iridium satellite connectivity. The inReach offers two-way texting to phone numbers entered on a computer before your trip. This provides welcome assurance to loved ones back home, and could prove incredibly useful during a rescue situation. With the inReach's built-in compass and downloadable topo maps, it also serves as a fully functional GPS. It will even connect to your Twitter and Facebook accounts. Update if you must, but don't cry to us if you get caught in an emergency only to find your last backcountry tweet killed your batteries (inreachdelorme.com, **\$370 plus service plan starting at \$15/month, no annual contract required**).



1

2

3

4

PADDLE | BIKE | RUN | CLIMB | FISH | DOG | MUSIC | FILM | PHOTO



The logo for Mountain Games Vail. It features a graphic of stylized mountains in blue and orange on the left. To the right, the word "GoPro" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font with a registered trademark symbol. Below it is a horizontal bar composed of four squares: light blue, medium blue, dark blue, and white. Underneath this is the word "MOUNTAIN" in white, bold letters, followed by "GAMES" in a larger white font, and "VAIL" in orange at the bottom right. At the very bottom, it says "VAIL VALLEY FOUNDATION" in a smaller white font.

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FROM PAGE 40

Sturges's final back freewheel.

hands."

Jackson is one of many Rey del Rio competitors with close ties to Juanito, a Peruvian who, at 34, had gained respect for paddling Chile's largest-volume runs in playboats, while also joining multiple groundbreaking expeditions, including a key role in West Hansen's first complete paddling descent of the Amazon from a newly discovered source in 2012. He traveled and competed with some of the same cast of characters during the 2012 and 2014 Whitewater Grand Prix. Though he was an extraordinarily talented kayaker, any mention of Juanito here starts with his vivacious persona off the river.

"He would meet somebody," Aniol Serrasoles recalls, "And break all the barriers right in that first meeting."

"Nothing ever got him down, no matter what the situation," adds Jackson. "It's always, 'It's all good, it could be worse.'" Of all the competitors needing that uplifting message, few had more emotion to work through than Gerd Serrasoles. Not only was he returning to a river that had nearly killed him, he was just with Juanito when he drowned in Chile. Surprisingly, a return to Mexico for closure on his own close call here, says Serrasoles, who took three clean, conservative lines over the falls, wasn't much of a consideration. "What am I gonna do, stop and cry?" he says. "I can just be happy and super-thankful for what happened, and I can't think

enough how lucky I was that I'm still here."

Dealing with Juanito's death, however, is something else entirely. They met on the Futaleufu River in Chile. Serrasolles was 18, newly arrived from Catalonia, Spain with a kayak and "no idea about anything." Juanito taught Serrasolles the lines on the river, and "everything" off of it, from the mysteries of women to shotgunning beers. Serrasolles admits he's not sleeping well. "It cuts my concentration," he says of the memories that surface too often. He wants to forget and make peace. Returning to the river is the only real option. "Things keep moving and you gotta jump on the train again or you get stuck."

That's easy to do here, as the sleepless rollercoaster of constant activity keeps moving. Ortiz announces Keller as the freeride contest winner, netting 166 points, just ahead of Sturges (157), Aniol Serrasolles (145), Marr (140) and Volckhausen (134). The party train heads right back to downtown Palenque. The vibe is a gear lower than the previous evening, competitors dealing with water-logged sinuses and bouts of "waterfall neck." Still, the party gathers steam, eventually taking over a hotel balcony.

It seems the life of a pro kayaker modulates between three states: on water, dealing with the nervous tug-of-war between sheer terror and Zen awareness; off water, celebrating and talking about the momentous jolt in nerves that's either just passed or is up next; and on shuttle, between the two. It all seems somewhat superficial, until the 19-year-old everyone calls Junior tells me what it's really about. Over celebratory drinks, Volckhausen, unscathed on the river but bearing fresh scars from the previous night's party, tells me how he recognized something early on in this search. He

CONT. ON PAGE 68



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SMALL MID WING

MSRP: \$299 Club Carbon,
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CATEGORY: Fitness
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 23 oz
LENGTH: Adjustable
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE AREA: 735 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Epic Small Mid Wing paddle is based on our award-winning Mid Wing, with a 2% reduced blade surface area. This slightly trimmed-down design makes it ideal for smaller paddlers, cruisers and racers paddling long distances, as well as those who simply seek a smaller option to maximize their efficiency. Available in Club Carbon and Full Carbon construction.

MID WING

MSRP: \$299 Club Carbon,
\$449 Full Carbon
CATEGORY: Fitness
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 24 oz
LENGTH: Adjustable
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE AREA: 735 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The award-winning Epic Mid Wing has become the top choice for fitness and racing paddlers, and increasingly, touring kayakers who want to maximize their forward stroke. Stable, smooth and powerful, the Mid Wing will have you paddling farther and faster. Available in Club Carbon and Full Carbon construction.

RELAXED TOURING

MSRP: \$279 Hybrid,
\$449 Full Carbon
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 22 oz
LENGTH: Adjustable
SHAFT MATERIAL: Straight Carbon,
Straight Glass
BLADE MATERIAL: Gelcoat Carbon
BLADE AREA: 625 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Epic Relaxed Touring paddle is lightweight, stable and exceedingly smooth. Perfect for the cruising kayaker and a slightly less aggressive, low angle paddle stroke. The Relaxed Touring blade features a longer and narrower surface area, facilitating a stroke easy on the shoulders with the power and control needed for any water conditions. Available in Hybrid, and Full Carbon construction.

ACTIVE TOURING

MSRP: \$279 Hybrid,
\$449 Full Carbon
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 24 oz
LENGTH: Adjustable
SHAFT MATERIAL: Straight Carbon,
Straight Glass
BLADE MATERIAL: Gelcoat Carbon
BLADE AREA: 685 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Epic Active Touring paddle combines the light-weight, clean performance of Epic's Relaxed Touring paddle with a larger blade surface, providing more power for paddlers utilizing a high angle stroke and seeking a distinct edge in speed and acceleration. Perfect for fast touring and racers who opt not to use a wing paddle. Available in Hybrid, and Full Carbon construction.

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CRYSTAL X

MSRP: \$189 - \$299
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Bent
WEIGHT: 32 oz
LENGTH: 210, 220, 230, 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon or Fiberglass
BLADE MATERIAL: Nylon Polymer, Transparent Nylon
BLADE AREA: 638 - 716 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The eye catching transparent blades paddle as good as they look. A multi-component design creates a blade that is extremely smooth and flutter free. This paddle is sure to be center of attention wherever it goes. Available in both high and low angle.



FISH

MSRP: \$159
CATEGORY: Fishing
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 29 oz
LENGTH: 220, 230, 240, 250 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Fiberglass
BLADE MATERIAL: Glass filled Polymer
BLADE AREA: 638 cm sq
FERRULE: O & 60

A kayak fishing specific tool, the H2O-Fish features a lightweight fiberglass shaft with tape measure and a unique Camo finish. Available in lengths up to 250 cm. The best tool in the box.



ECO-REC LWT

MSRP: \$149
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 28 oz
LENGTH: 210, 220, 230, 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Fiberglass
BLADE MATERIAL: ECO-Friendly Glass filled Polymer
BLADE AREA: 638 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable, Fast Ferrule

Our most popular paddle, featuring a high performance lightweight glass fiber polymer blade. An extremely smooth and powerful blade available in both a low and high angle to meet all paddling needs. Available with our Fast Ferrule system to make feather adjustments on the fly a breeze.



H2O SUP

MSRP: \$189
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 31 oz
LENGTH: Adjustable 70" - 86"
SHAFT MATERIAL: Fiberglass
BLADE MATERIAL: Fiberglass/ Polyro
BLADE AREA: 632 cm sq

A larger blade for smooth and generous power. A traditional tear drop design featuring a slightly larger surface area than our Team cut to provide plenty of power on the windiest, waviest day. Comes with a height adjustable shaft for a perfect fit.



H2O-2

MSRP: \$1699 - \$349
CATEGORY: Whitewater, Creeking
SHAFT: Bent
WEIGHT: 38 oz
LENGTH: 188, 191, 194, 197 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Glass filled Nylon
BLADE AREA: 680 cm sq
FERRULE: O, 12, 30, 45

The H2O-2 series provides solid performance with crisp blade feel, control and enhanced comfort. New shaft design for 2015. Available in Bent or standard straight shaft builds. Asymmetrical blade profile provides solid performance for both freestyle and river running.



GRAPHIC INLAY

MSRP: \$299
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Breakdown
WEIGHT: 27 - 31 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Composite Carbon
BLADE AREA: 484 - 709 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

Swift paddles possess a radiant translucence in sunlight that is highly visible and exceptionally beautiful. We offer many stunning custom graphic inlays that are translucent and quite striking when the sun shines through them. There are a variety of styles and colors to choose from. Each style is a limited edition.

MID SWIFT

MSRP: \$279 - \$329
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Breakdown
WEIGHT: 27 - 31 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Composite Carbon
BLADE AREA: 645 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Mid Swift is our most popular blade size and an excellent choice for most touring kayakers. It delivers plenty of pull and control in rough water and windy conditions. The ideal paddle for extended paddling in varied and changeable conditions and the only paddle many kayakers will ever need.

SEA SWIFT

MSRP: \$279 - \$329
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Breakdown
WEIGHT: 27 - 31 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Composite Carbon
BLADE AREA: 709 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Sea Swift is a full sized aggressive blade design that retains the versatility of conventional blades for bracing, sculling and rolling while offering sufficient power to be useful in the racing world. It is ideal as a big water paddle in surf and rough conditions for the more athletic paddler.

SKOOKUM HIGH ANGLE

MSRP: \$279 - \$329
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Breakdown
WEIGHT: 27 - 31 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Composite Carbon
BLADE AREA: 709 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Skookum is specifically customized to suit the paddler who prefers a high-angle performance paddle. It retains all the power and thrust and smooth follow through of the original Sea Swift only with a high angle of attack. The Skookum combines the most important elements of a high angle paddle—control, power, and efficiency.

WIND SWIFT

MSRP: \$279 - \$329
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Breakdown
WEIGHT: 27 - 31 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 240 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Composite Carbon
BLADE AREA: 484 cm sq
FERRULE: Adjustable

The Wind Swift combines Aleut features with some more modern European concepts to create a paddle that is excellent in high winds and still delivers a healthy amount of paddle power for all but the most demanding conditions. Another major advantage to this style of paddle is kindness to joints and muscles.

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GUIDE



CAMANO

MSRP: \$260 - \$370
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 27.5 oz
LENGTH: 205 - 260 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Fiberglass
BLADE AREA: 650 cm sq
FERRULE: Smart-View Adjustable Ferrule

Our most popular award winning blade design. Providing the perfect combination for paddlers who want enough power to cover their days journey with ease, using a relaxed all around low angle stroke. Matched with ample fit and design features, you can outfit yourself for a lifetime of paddling.



CYPRUS

MSRP: \$385 - \$475
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 23.25 oz
LENGTH: 200 - 250 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Carbon
Foam Core
BLADE AREA: 610 cm sq
FERRULE: Smart-View Adjustable Ferrule

With our best paddling design and construction features, you'll feel exceptionally light, buoyant strokes while the smooth back face gives a quiet entrance and exit from the water. A smart choice for those with a high-angle style of paddling and want the conservative feel of a mid-sized blades.



OVATION

MSRP: \$480 - \$570
CATEGORY: Touring
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 19.25 oz
LENGTH: 210 - 260 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Carbon
Foam Core
BLADE AREA: 643 cm sq
FERRULE: Smart-View Adjustable Ferrule

In honor of the man who started it all, the Werner Sr. Edition Ovation is the culmination of decades of experience on the water and in the Research and Development room, working with composite materials and construction. The feeling on the water complements the name.



DEMSHITZ SHERPA

MSRP: \$250 - \$345
CATEGORY: Whitewater, Creeking
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 34.75 oz
LENGTH: 158 - 230 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Fiberglass
BLADE AREA: 680 cm sq
FERRULE: Fixed, L or R, 0-90 in 5 degree increments

Smaller sized and more mature Demshitz trust the Sherpa to hit up the local stouts, so why not give them their own model?! White water paddlers need to have fun, if not they stress too hard thinking about the next drop. Celebrate running browns and the lifestyle we love.



SHO-GUN

MSRP: \$350 - \$450
CATEGORY: Whitewater, Downriver
SHAFT: Straight
WEIGHT: 36 oz
LENGTH: 162 - 230 cm
SHAFT MATERIAL: Carbon
BLADE MATERIAL: Carbon
Foam Core
BLADE AREA: 711 cm sq
FERRULE: Fixed, L or R, 0-90 in 5 degree increments

Our most advanced technology is in this river running paddle. As powerful as its name suggests, the rivers that paddlers take the Sho-Gun often need some aggression to navigate each line. Decades of experience led us to the chosen paddle for many at the top of their game.



Photo: John Rathwell

"He was everything you want in someone on the river," Jackson, pictured left, says of his late friend Juan Antonio de Ugarte, right, though it's the off-river memories that sustain the competitors most.

on always to back you up. That responsibility creates more than friendship. Losing one of those connections to the river, says Chilean competitor Marcos Gallegos, only makes the bonds stronger. Gallegos, too, met Juanito as a young kayaker on the Futaleufu. The pair began traveling on the same seasonal work-and-play schedule from the Futa to the Ottawa. Two days before Juanito drove south to the Nilahue, they shared some broader laughs about life, paddling and the future while celebrating Gallegos's 27th birthday.

"Sometimes (kayaking) you are crazy in your stuff and you want to get better," Gallegos says, "But Juanito would tell you to not worry about that, to be a better person, be yourself, be humble. Maybe you don't get it the first time, but as you grow and meet more people, those are really good values." That outlook has affected Gallegos's interactions with his family, where his focus is on the present, showing his love in any time shared. It's galvanized his approach to river running, being there

dropped out of high school, took his college fund to enroll at the Ottawa Kayak School's Keener Program, and never looked back. He's learned one thing, that life is a confluence of connections and opportunity. That's it: life is connection.

The real attraction to a lifestyle that depends on new horizons is more than traveling the world and hucking stouts. It's connection, a kind of brotherhood forged on the river. The greater the risk, the deeper the bond—someone you can depend

CONT. ON PAGE 70

68 | canoekayak.com

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Photo: John Rathwell

JUANITO REMEMBERED:
“Papi, take it easy,” Ortiz recalls the favorite reminder of his close friend, de Ugarte, “It’s better to lose one day in a life than a life in one day.”

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for your crew no matter what, “with your best attitude, prepared, and trying to bring the best positive energy you can.” As I look down to his shirt, which reads “One Life,” I realize how this sharp edge of our sport has less to do with cheap-thrills approaches to big waterfalls than it does with the approaches to everything else that matters.

The event has proven that progress in kayaking follows a simple rule: momentum begets momentum. One trick leads to another. And as the three-day bender closes, competitors bear-hug goodbyes, carrying that momentum home to invigorate others to push for the next level.

That infectious energy inspires confidence that as long as there's rivers to paddle, and ways to cultivate those willing to push, paddling will continue to evolve in more dynamic directions. As Gallegos put it, with the right crew, anything is possible. ★

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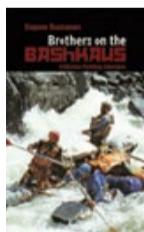
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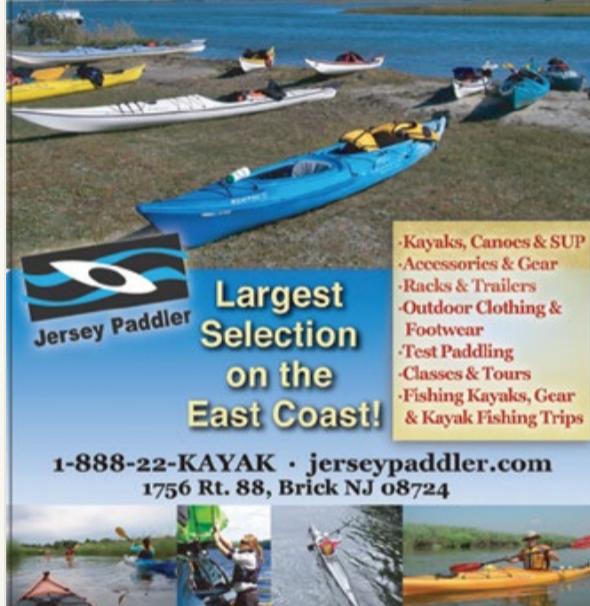


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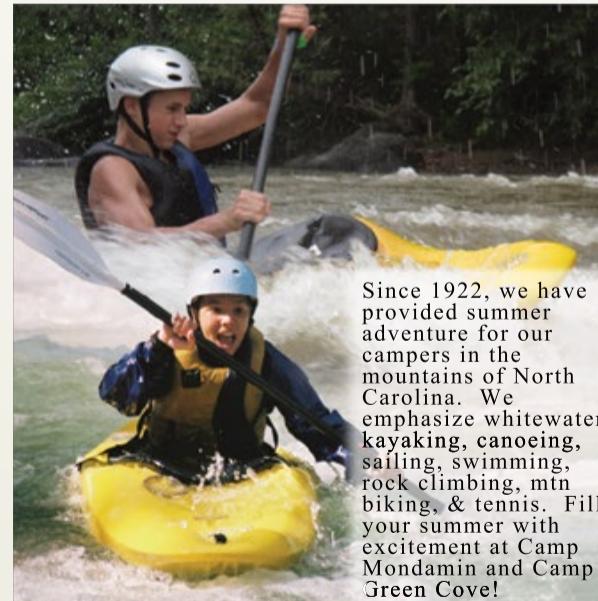
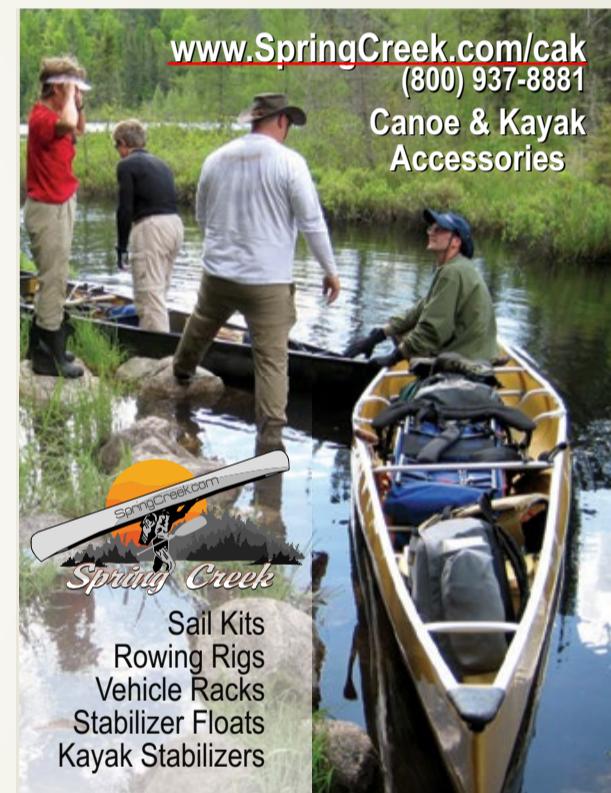
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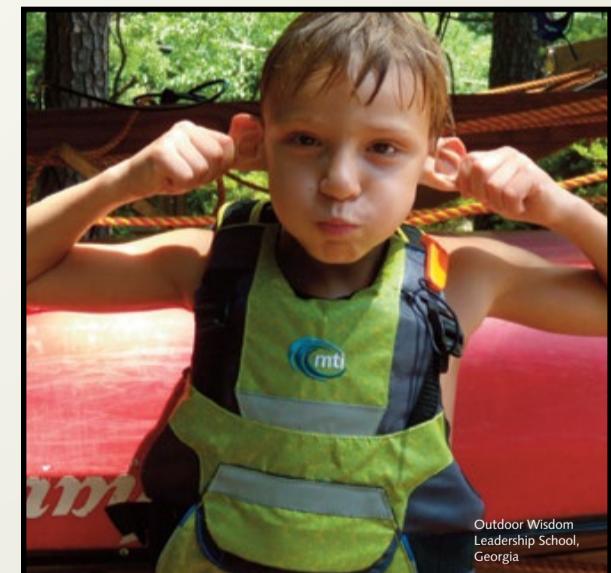
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GORDON BROWN

SEA KAYAK COACH

BY CONOR MIHELL

Gordon Brown is an outlier amongst a generation of adventurers who place the highest value on going to the ends of the earth. Brown, 52, would just as soon launch from his "garden" beach on Scotland's Isle of Skye than paddle anywhere else. Brown delights in sharing those waters, both in person through Skyak Adventures, the sea kayaking school he runs with his wife Morag, and via a popular series of instructional films.

Brown's pure joy of exploring the Scottish coast is one of his most infectious traits. "Everywhere I go, I'm always comparing it with what I have at my doorstep," says Brown. "Greenland is very special as the birthplace of kayaking and Alaska has whales, which we don't have here. But Scotland has just about everything else and I can paddle out my door every day of the year."

Growing up in Scotland I was always near the water. When I was 9, my dad saw an ad in the local paper for a sea kayak. He bought it, and I've been paddling ever since.

We have the "right to roam" in Scotland. There's no law of trespass. Everything from vertical rock, caves, sea stacks, arches and sandy beaches are close by and the coastline is entirely accessible to the public.

My dad worked at Chrysler as an engineer, so cars have always been a part of my life. I started doing off-road stuff at age 10. My dad had to push the seat far enough forward so I could reach the pedals.

I was the Scottish rally car champion twice. Then it all got too expensive and that ended my involvement in motorsports. I have no passion for it anymore.

The first paddling club I was a part of was very forward-thinking. Anyone coming through the club did something called a "sea proficiency" test. I did mine at age 14. Right after that I did my first instructor's course.

That was how all the clubs were set up—to improve your skills and confidence. There were very few companies back then, so the whole British Canoe Union coaching scheme was set up around the club. You didn't just take a course and get an award. It was expected that you worked with mentors and peers to improve. You got the award when you were ready for it.

When I was training for my Level 5 coach, part of the criteria was doing a project. I thought, I'll make a video. I got sponsorship from Valley and Lendal and worked with a professional filmmaking company. I had 10,000 words of script.

We released 'Over...and Out' in 1993. We made it searchable—so when it was being played, you could fast-forward between sections by reading the titles. It was in chapters, just like a DVD. It was my original rescue video.

Fast-forward a heap of years. I got together with Simon Willis, who was about to retire from the BBC. We talked about making films together.

I don't like being in front of the camera at all. Simon does the filming and Morag makes sure I'm doing all the right things at all the right times. It frustrates the life out of me, but most of the time she's right. She's definitely the guiding light.

After 20 years of work as a mechanic I was getting fed up. I was doing more and more sea kayak coaching and got the idea to start a business. It was up and running by 2001.

Morag is an MD. When we started out, she was the safety buffer. She took a break in 2004 to look after the kids and run the business. She is Skyak Adventures and I'm just the guy on the water.

The famous BCU coaching scheme is moving away from the practical club-based approach that I grew up with to being more academic. The highest coaching certification in the UK is now a university post-graduate diploma.

It's been absolutely fascinating for me, but I don't think it's making paddlesports any more accessible. It makes people feel excluded from practical coaching. If it had been like this when I was starting out, I would've never done it.

People can do more than they think they can. You start with teaching them how to handle a paddle, how to maneuver the boat and do support strokes. After all that, you teach them the rescues.

There's an awful lot of rubbish spoken about how to do things. Think about your movement: Is it making the boat do what you want it to do? As long as you're getting the results and not getting injured, it's good.



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ANDIS PIKĀNS: On the first trip Raimonds was the only one with any experience. This time we all had it, so it was easier. Looking back, it was reckless to go there without any experience.

RAIMONDS DOMBROVSKIS: I was skeptical that we'd make it to the end, but we had a tailwind the whole way except for the last three days. It was lazy-man's style.

PIKĀNS: All the people we met were so different and interesting. The best part was learning about their lives and hearing their stories. We met a new friend



from Finland, a Russian named Yakov, and Wolfgang, the German artist and fossil hunter.

DOMBROVSKIS: We had a great group. I'd give it a nine out of 10. Some of us were a bit lazy, some got lost in time and place, but all went well. We all had a good sense of humor.

PIKĀNS: Locals told us the weather would stop us from making it because we began so late. But we arrived in Emmonak before the snow.

DOMBROVSKIS: We had a tailwind and almost no rain. The day after we left Emmonak, it started to snow for the rest of the winter. We were lucky, lucky, lucky.

PIKĀNS: We found a bear's head with skin and guts along the river. It was only a couple of hours old. Eating the bear's heart with rice was Janis's idea. No one questioned it. We thought it was a delicacy.

DOMBROVSKIS: Janis, who's an experienced hunter, said that the heart is very good meat. So there was no second thought

about wasting it.

PIKĀNS: The most dangerous part of the trip was meeting a fully armed mountain man named Johnny. He came in his boat, took our Pelican cases with our cameras. After we followed him, he said he saw some guys take the equipment and was going after them. It could have ended badly.

DOMBROVSKIS: When you get someone like him with his Magnum and us with rifles, some story like *Deliverance* isn't too far off.

PIKĀNS: We hunted and fished the whole way. The fishing was great, but we could only do it in the creeks. Janis hunted down a giant beaver with his Winchester, which we traded to an Athabasca Indian.

DOMBROVSKIS: I can't imagine going there without a rod and rifle. We also ate a lot of salmon eggs. North Americans do not eat them, but we do, with vodka, like Doctor Zhivago.





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